

No 3

By
Lady Kitty Vincent



TO THE READER

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Dearest Lord

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"No. 3"

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

A King's Messenger is murdered, and an important document is stolen.

Gyp Kiknadze, daughter of a Georgian Prince and an English mother, has the ideal temperament for a Secret Service agent, and during the war was used by the British Intelligence. She is employed now to recover the missing paper.

Marseilles, Algiers, and the far North of Scotland are visited by Gyp in her search, and in the end Love helps her to win the game.

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"No. 3"

BY
LADY KITTY VINCENT

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DEDICATION

Dearest Mama,—

I dedicate my “shilling shocker” to you for two reasons.

Firstly, because when I was of tender years and saw tigers in the bushes and Red Indians in the form of the helpless footman, you neither checked nor chid me. Upon your head, therefore, be the result.

Secondly, because had you known the real “Gyp,” you would have both loved and admired her.

She faced the rifles of her executioners on a cold grey morning with the same gay courage as that with which you meet the arrows and slings of Fate.

London, 1923.

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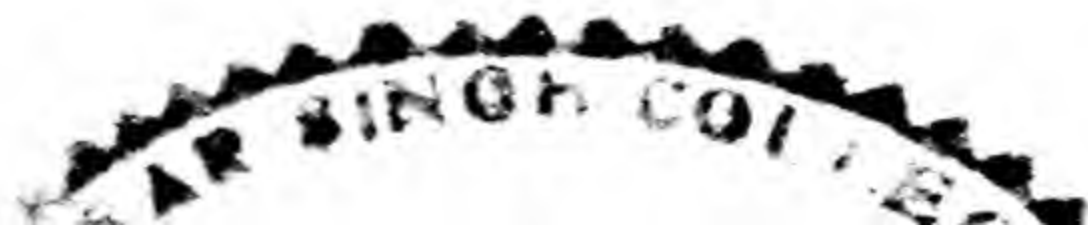
“No. 3”

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH I MEET THAT FASCINATING WOMAN
GYP KIKNADZE

I LIT another cigarette, literally because I had nothing better to do, then threw it away half smoked, and looked round the room in desperation. A bachelor's flat at twelve midday is as incongruous a thing as kissing a woman in tweeds and brogued shoes. At least that is how it appears to me. I must confess I like the right setting for the right thing. While a man's room in chambers is all very well for a hurried breakfast, or a midnight supper, it is anything but attractive in the cold grey light of a November morning.

Normally, I should have been at the Foreign Office. As it was, owing to a bad attack of influenza and bronchitis, I was trying to collect sufficient energy to



determine where I should spend my sick leave.

The telephone bell whirred suddenly, shattering the silence with that nerve-racking effect peculiar to telephones. I was in the mood to welcome any diversion, however trivial. Even a conversation with my tailor would have distracted me, although ordinarily any communication from him filled me with distrust. When I heard the voice at the other end, however, I cheered up considerably. "Hallo, Deryk," it began, "are you sufficiently convalescent to come out to lunch?"

"Rather," I said joyfully. It was Cassel Campbell speaking, an old friend of mine, and a rather important person in one of the many branches of the Intelligence Department at the War Office.

"Will the Savoy, one-thirty, suit you?" he asked, and when I assented, "righto, I'll look out for you in the lounge, or the Palm Court, or whatever the thing's called."

Whatever my mood, the Savoy has power to cheer me up more than any other restaurant that I know of in London. The moment that I pass through the swing-doors I begin to feel revitalised. The cosmopolitan crowd—for one sees more nationalities there than anywhere else—the

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beautifully-dressed women of the *beau-monde* and the *demi-monde*, international crooks, Cabinet Ministers having pleasant but indiscreet lunches ; in fact the whole delightful atmosphere of vitality and intrigue tends to remagnetise the most depressed personality.

I caught sight of Colonel Campbell, to give him his full rank, at once. He was sitting in front of one of the little tables with the look of a man who cannot withstand the insistent voice of a cocktail much longer. He waved to me, and asked, "Manhattan or Martini ?"

"Martini," I said, "and as dry as they make 'em. I want cheering up."

The combination of the atmosphere and the drink was eminently satisfactory, and in five minutes I had begun to take a more cheerful view of life.

"Where are you going to spend your sick leave ?" Cassel asked me.

"Dashed if I know," I said a little peevishly, "you've no idea how this cursed 'flu saps one's energy. I'm perfectly fit now. and yet I can't make a start."

"I was wondering," he said tentatively, "if you would care for a little job. You were always very keen on 'stunts' as a boy."

" Sounds interesting "—I was faintly thrilled—" what sort of a job is it ? "

" I can't give you details here," he explained, " but, as a matter of fact, I should be personally grateful for your help. Will you come round to my flat this evening—the unofficial one, in Baker Street—and then I could explain the whole thing to you, and introduce you to your accomplice."

" I'll come with pleasure," I said enthusiastically ; " what time ? "

" Seven-thirty, and don't change." He turned the conversation into other channels, and I had to curb my curiosity till the evening.

The lamps along Baker Street looked like yellow topazes against a background of blue velvet as I walked towards Campbell's flat. He found it useful to have a place where he could see people without their coming to his own rooms, where he was well known. This flat had two entrances, a distinct convenience on many occasions, and it was leased under the name of Colonel Davies. Cassel's soldier-servant, whom he had had for innumerable years, opened the door. He knew me nearly as well as he knew Campbell, but his expression never changed when he saw me. He was an invaluable man, although at times I wondered if he were quite human.

He threw open the door of the single living-room—names were never given in that flat—and I walked in. Cassel was sitting by his writing-table, his long artistic fingers—fingers which were saved from weakness by their broad tips—drumming on its surface. A girl was sitting doubled up on the big low sofa, and Campbell nodded to me and then made the introduction: "Miss Kiknadze—Lord Warburton."

Gyp Kiknadze was about twenty-eight—perhaps the most charming age for a fascinating woman: all the crudeness of youth has vanished, leaving only its spontaneity and freshness. She was fairly tall, with long limbs and the perfect balance which comes from muscles that are in the last stage of suppleness and elasticity. Her hair was coiled low on her neck and fell in heavy waves across her ears. But it was her eyes which attracted me most. They were grey, with very thick black lashes, and they were set wide apart in her cleanly-modelled face. They were sad eyes, but the greater part of the time there was a gleam of mischief in them, which took away all their sorrow. I suppose that, strictly speaking, the mouth spoilt an otherwise lovely face. It was too passionate, and yet the firmly-folded corners showed perfect self-control.

" We'd better have dinner first," Campbell said, " and then get to business. Are you, either of you, hungry ? "

Gyp Kiknadze laughed. " Ravenous is nearer the mark," she said. " I forgot about luncheon, and then I didn't want to spoil my dinner by eating tea."

" I see you haven't changed," Campbell remarked coolly. He turned to me, his eyes twinkling. " She's a hopeless woman," he said. " Most of the time she's penniless, but she insists on keeping a Mercedes and a large Alsatian wolf-dog. After she's fed the car with petrol and the dog with meat, there's not much over for her."

" People must be allowed to economise in their own way," Gyp protested. " I've done pretty useful work with that dog and the car for you at one time and another. Anyway, I hate getting my feet wet—in London."

When I think of that last remark in the light of later events, it makes me smile—it was so characteristic of Gyp Kiknadze. If it were necessary during a job, she would be as dirty and disreputable as an old tramp, but at other times she was as fastidious as a cat. She adored bath salts, the most ridiculously fine silk stockings, and all the little refinements and luxuries that

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play so large a part in the modern woman's life.

"I bet the car's not far off," Cassel said.

"Not *very* far," Gyp admitted, "but you didn't expect me to advertise my presence here by a Mercedes and a big dog outside your door. I left them both near a little restaurant in a side street."

"Is it safe?" I asked. There had been a good many car robberies about that time.

"Safe?" Cassel echoed. "I should be sorry to go near that car while Flora was in it. I must say they make an excellent colour scheme. The dog is a goldy tan, and the Mercedes has a copper bonnet and copper disc wheels. When you get Gyp in a brown leather suit and cap to match, it's some picture, I can tell you." He chuckled wickedly, but the girl remained unmoved.

"It costs no more to have the colours you like than those you don't," she said firmly; then, as the door closed finally behind the servant, leaving port and cigarettes on the table, Campbell turned to me and said: "I expect you want to hear about the plan of which I spoke to you at luncheon."

I nodded, and there was a moment's silence as Cassel lit another cigarette. The noise of London seemed very far away; the fire in the big wide grate burned with vivid

blue and green flamelets, which sprang, crackling, from the sea-salted logs. Against the dull gold wall-paper Gyp's smooth head was etched in sharp outline; her bronze-coloured frock with its necklace of heavy amber toned with the warm colour of the old leather chairs. Under her straight brows her great eyes gazed at Campbell with unswerving glance. I waited breathlessly. The scene was unreal, fantastic: I felt sure that in another moment I would struggle into consciousness and distinguish the clinging reek of ether. I almost jumped when Campbell began to speak.

" You may, or may not, know," he said, " that Sir Maurice Levy, one of, if not the greatest of our scientific men, has recently discovered a substitute for petrol which will enable aeroplanes to remain in the air for a period of time covering several days. You can imagine what an inestimable advantage this would confer on the nation that possessed the secret of this fuel, in the event of another war."

" Good heavens!" I said, " what an amazing discovery."

" The formula for this fuel," Campbell continued, " was sent out by special King's Messenger to a certain friend of Sir Maurice's who lives in Egypt, and who possesses the

necessary facilities for testing it. It was necessary," Cassel explained, "to see how it would work in dry rarefied air. The atmosphere in England is too humid to allow of complete tests being made. Unfortunately, in spite of the most stringent precautions, the formula was stolen. Not only that, but the King's Messenger was found murdered. A few days later Sir Maurice died. He was so impressed by the magnitude of his own discovery, and the ghastly horrors that might ensue should the paper fall into the wrong hands, that he had destroyed every trace of the formula. He could trust his own brain, and he had no reason to anticipate an early death. But you can see for yourself that we are in a nasty predicament. The only person who knew the secret is dead, and the greater part of that same secret is in the hands of an enemy Power."

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated

"There is only one gleam of light," Campbell said. "The most important factor in the formula was left out. It was sent by another route and another messenger. We thought it best to take stringent precautions, and unfortunately our care has been only too well justified.

"Although, up to a point," he continued,

"the secret is still intact, the sooner it can be recovered, the better. Part of the formula is in code, but that is only a temporary measure of security. It is not a very elaborate code, our chief line of defence being the absence of the essential factor. Directly it has been tested and found satisfactory, all traces of the present formula will be destroyed."

"And your plan?" I asked.

Campbell lit another cigarette.

"Gyp Kiknadze is going in search of the stolen document," he said. "We have certain information which enables us to have a suspicion, at any rate, as to where the paper is bound for. You may think this sounds a hopeless quest—so it may be—but if anyone can find the formula it will be Gyp."

The girl smiled. "Thank heaven for the chance of a little fun again," she said lightly. "I was getting thoroughly rusty and bored. It's a great life, if you don't weaken."

"And where do I come in?" I asked patiently.

Cassel laughed. "As Gyp's assistant—in fact you are like the man with the white gloves who helps the clown at the circus. But joking apart, will you take the job on? This is a case where two brains may be

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needed, or two pairs of hands. No one is likely to associate you with any espionage work. You are simply one of the idle rich travelling for your health. But what you do, you must do with your eyes open," he warned. "This may turn out to be a simple job and over and finished with in a fortnight. Or it may be a long and dangerous business. Once you are in it, you are in it up to the neck."

"If Miss Kiknadze——" I began, but she interrupted me. "It is my job," she said. "I'm a sort of stormy petrel, happiest when there are squalls about, but with you it is different."

"If you will let me be whatever help I can to you," I said diffidently, then I couldn't help it. I burst forth: "*Do* let me come; it's the sort of adventure I've always longed for. I'll do just what you tell me."

"You're the right sort of person," Gyp said; "we'll have a hatful of fun. I must go home now and get some beauty sleep." She uncurled herself indolently—I never saw her make a movement that was not graceful the whole time that I was with her. She picked up a fur coat and huddled it round her shoulders.

"You'll be ready to start at a moment's notice?" she said. "When things start

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moving, they move quickly. Good night." She melted out of the side door into the darkness.

"That's a great girl," Campbell said reminiscently.

"Tell me about her." I was frankly curious. To say the least of it, Gyp Kiknadze was extraordinarily fascinating.

"She did more valuable work for the British Intelligence during the war than any other agent with whom I came in contact, and that is saying a good deal. You know that an agent's work is not what the films and a certain class of novel make it out to be. It does not consist in making love to archdukes who obligingly leave valuable papers on the table for the beautiful spy to pick up. It is monotonous, tiring, and often sordid work. Gyp Kiknadze has all the necessary qualifications for the job—courage, camaraderie, and a sense of humour."

"How did she come to take it up?" I asked; "it's not work that one usually associates with a lady—to use a horrible word."

"Her mother was English," Campbell said, "and her father was a Georgian prince—you can tell that from the name. She was in Paris when the war broke out. She came to me with a letter of introduction and

wanted work. When I discovered that she spoke French, German, Russian and English, I decided she was too good for clerk's work, and I tried her out with a job or two. She's a regular little cosmopolitan, and as I said, I have yet to find the job that she can't tackle."

"I suppose she works for you regularly?"

Campbell shook his head. "She disappears for months at a time and then turns up from Nish or Philippopolis or Smyrna, generally with some useful information. She's frightfully proud, and often I don't know her whereabouts for months at a time. That's the English blood in her. Her Georgian blood makes her utterly improvident and frightfully extravagant. She's only got five hundred a year from some capital that was her mother's, and she hides herself in these outlandish places when she's more than usually broke. She knows how to get the most out of life for the least expenditure in various odd corners of the earth. You can rely on her utterly, and she'll never leave you in a tight corner."

I smoked for a little while in silence, then I got up to go.

"Good luck," Cassel said, shaking me by the hand; "I shan't see you again, I expect—better not. I hope I haven't pushed you farther than you wanted to go."

I laughed. “ Not on your life ! This is the sort of adventure of which I have always dreamed.”

I let myself out into the street. It was a clear frosty night, and above my head the Milky Way stretched broadly serene. I felt vaguely important, and rather a dog. The gods must laugh sometimes when they turn the pages of our story, glance at the end, and then watch our little struttings.

CHAPTER II

ABOUT AGENTS OF IMPORTANCE

THE *Nankin* ploughed her way through the Bay of Biscay, pitching and tossing with sickening regularity.

I am too good a sailor to be upset by any weather that ever came out of Davy Jones's locker, but the motion had proved too much for the majority of the passengers, and the small saloon was practically empty.

The *Nankin* is one of the P. & O. intermediate boats, and although she is not patronised by those fortunate people who have money to burn, she is exceedingly easy and well-found. She was slightly over full for complete comfort, but I was too pleased to escape from the fogs and smuts of London to object to a little overcrowding. Still it was a distinct relief to have a little more space, and I established myself upon the settee by the piano.

I was still inclined to wonder if I should not wake up and find it was all a dream. Two or three days had passed after the

dinner at Campbell's flat without either word or sign from Gyp, till one evening as I left my room I ran into her in the street. We exchanged a few casual remarks about the weather, then she said quickly : " Book a berth on the *Nankin* ; she sails the day after to-morrow. Take your servant, and travel as you would if you were entirely on your own. And remember we don't know each other till I give the sign."

The only fly in my ointment was the fact that my old servant Kendricks was sick, and that I was " making do " with a substitute. He was not a bad fellow ; I took him on the recommendation of the man who ran the chambers where I lived, but Kendricks knew my ways and Greenwood was not particularly competent. However, he was better than nothing, and I am not ashamed to own that I am one of those feeble people who consider a servant a necessity. I loathe packing and looking after my own things ; I think it is waste of time and energy. I know that the strong, silent man of fiction flings a few things into a suit-case with one hand, while with the other he does a little accurate sharp-shooting. Unfortunately, I am not built that way, and I like my creature comforts to be properly provided for.

Even I found reading rather a strain, and

I was just beginning to doze when the sound of a voice at my elbow made me start. I opened my eyes and found one of my cabin companions. "Sorry if I woke you," he said, "have you got a match on you ; I cannot find a box anywhere, or a steward either."

"I wasn't asleep," I lied. "I was in that perilously drowsy condition which comes before a fit of yawning—which, in turn, leads to sea-sickness I'm told, though, thank goodness, I've never suffered from it."

"More than can be said for most of the other passengers," Hancock said, grinning ; "our stable companion is *in extremis*, only rousing himself at intervals to call upon the Almighty. I've just poured a glass of champagne down his throat."

He puffed away in silence for a few moments, then a gleam of interest came into his eyes.

"That's the only pretty girl on board," he said, "but she's pretty enough to make up for the rest of 'em. By Jove ! she's got topping ankles."

I glanced up and saw Gyp. Except for a glimpse the first evening I had seen nothing of her, and I had thought it possible that she was a victim to the weather. She looked fit enough, however, as she came down the companion-way, clinging cautiously to the hand-rail. I watched the slender ankles and

small tan-shod feet trying for a precarious foothold with a feeling of expectation. Then the *Nankin* stopped dead suddenly and shivered, the whole saloon was plunged in darkness, and a green sea swept her from stem to stern. There was a long, continuous rattle of falling crockery and flying pans, then silence as she steadied herself and seemed to draw breath.

The girl was lying in a heap at the bottom of the stairs, and Hancock hurried towards her. She looked up slowly, looking a little dazed, and limped towards the settee. I made room for her beside me and she gave me a quick smile, but no other sign of recognition.

“ I’m all right really,” she said. “ I gave myself a jar for a second like Jill in the nursery rhyme.

“ Have you been ill ? ” I asked sympathetically.

“ Not at all,” she laughed. “ I’m never sea-sick, but there’s a wretched woman in my cabin who can hardly lift her head, and as the stewardess is so busy, I’ve been looking after her. I don’t pretend I like the job, but isn’t there some tiresome proverb about helping lame dogs over stiles ? ” She shrugged her shoulders and her eyes twinkled.

“ What about tea ? ” she asked, “ or do

you think that last crash meant the end of all the tea-pots ? ”

“ You’re not afraid to face tea ? ” Hancock said. It was plain that he was already very *épris*.

Gyp smiled at his question and shook her head.

“ I’ve just been seventeen times round the deck, which the Captain assures me is equal to a mile, so I think I deserve a little tea.” She lit a cigarette and blew two perfect rings. “ Does that look as if I were seasick ? ” she demanded.

There was no affectation about her. She was curiously boyish in some ways, but she possessed just that touch of feminine elusiveness which is so attractive. Her brown silk jersey clung to the curves of her supple body, and her short, brown tweed skirt was reminiscent of peat smoke and Irish bogs.

The steward brought some cups and plates, but before he could put on the fiddles they danced merrily down the tables, colliding with the tea-pot *en route*. I grabbed one cup and Hancock another, and Gyp rescued the tea-pot.

“ If we’re going to have tea together we must be properly introduced,” she said demurely. “ Who’s going to do it ? It’s like Alice in Wonderland and the leg of mutton.

Tea-pot," she inclined its spout solemnly towards Hancock. "Allan Hancock," he said beaming. The tea-pot bowed. "And this is Lord Warburton," Hancock added. "It only remains to introduce myself," Gyp said; "Teapot, know Miss Kiknadze—commonly known as 'Gyp' *tout court*."

"No one ever calls me by my surname for more than ten minutes," she explained; "however there's no harm in trying," she added, catching sight of the gleam in Hancock's eye.

The latter looked so cast down that I burst out laughing, and Gyp began pouring out tea. Our little party was presently increased by the addition of a Frenchman who looked as though every moment might be his last. He gulped down a cup of tea, and Gyp pressed a small packet of Mothersill upon him, accompanied by a sweet smile and a few words in his native language. The accent was super-perfect. The little man bowed and smiled.

"Mademoiselle est Francaise?" he asked. She shook her head, and the Frenchman dared linger no longer, but made a somewhat hurried exit, clutching his Mothersill.

"Why do you carry anti-seasick remedies?" Hancock asked, "when you are never ill."

"Oh, I'm like the Swiss Family Robinson," Gyp said. "Don't you remember whenever they wanted anything, it always appeared, as if by magic. As a matter of fact, the packet was a love token presented to me before I left London. I had forgotten all about it, till I saw that poor little man's face. I feared the worst might occur at any moment."

She rose from the table as she spoke. "I must go and see my patient," she said. "Au revoir till dinner."

"That's a fascinating creature," Hancock said gloomily.

"Cheer up," I laughed. "It's early days yet; the ship may contain other charmers for all you know." But he was not to be comforted. "It's the ones who don't give a damn for you who are always the ones you like," he expounded ungrammatically.

I went towards the second-class to look for my servant. A hundred times a day I found myself regretting Kendrick's absence. I had never been away without him before, and we had made many trips together. Greenwood did his best, no doubt, but it was not the same as having a man who knew all my ways, and at present he was *hors de combat* with sea-sickness. I picked my way gingerly down the alley-way on the port side of the

Nankin, past the serving-place towards the second-class cabins. Sounds of distress issuing from the various berths that I passed made me congratulate myself on being a good sailor, and when I reached Greenwood's abode I was even more thankful. I fled hastily, only staying long enough to advise him to get a little air.

I concentrated my energies on trying to dress for dinner, on preventing myself from being flung against the cabin walls, and in listening to the complaints of the third occupant of the cabin, whom the champagne had revived sufficiently to render querulous. At the end of an exhausting half-hour, I opened the door and bumped into Gyp who was leaving her cabin. We laughed and she took my arm as I clung to the hand-rail and tried to steady myself against the lurching and rolling of the ship. Dinner was a sparsely-attended function: people were dotted about in twos and threes, and when I clambered up the companion way and looked round the saloon I found it nearly empty. Every one had gone below, and there was no one but Gyp curled up in a corner of the settee.

"The night being what it is," she said, "I am breaking all rules and smoking up here." She puffed luxuriously through a curious carved amber cigarette holder.

"You're not a bit what I expected you would be," I said slowly.

"I'm sorry." A hint of mischief lit up her eyes. "I know that on the stage and in books, agents have flashing eyes and are covered with jewels. I'm afraid I've got nothing in the way of jewels, except some very good amber. You see we are quite ordinary individuals really; we eat and drink and sleep like anyone else. When I read the amazing stories that are written about us I am thrilled."

"To tell you the truth," I confessed, "I've never had occasion to come directly into contact with a sp—agent."

"Yes, do use the latter word," Gyp begged, her eyes twinkling, "it sounds so much better! It's the same thing in the end, but you know how people object to the word 'wages.' They like 'salary.' We like to be called 'agents'!"

"I expect you've had some pretty exciting times," I asked.

"Oh, well, once or twice it's been rather touch-and-go," she said reminiscently, "but you know most of the time one's doing little fiddling jobs—not the exciting things you read about. During the war one was more likely to be told to find out what regiments were in what brigade, than to shadow a

Grand Duke. I'm never sorry that I took the work up. I've made some very good friends."

I looked round the saloon cautiously, feeling like the villain in the piece. Luckily I have a sense of humour, or I might have become more melodramatic than the occasion demanded. Nothing is so easy as to lose one's sense of value.

"How are things going?" I asked.

"Nicely, thank you." Gyp yawned—ever so slightly, but still it was an unmistakable yawn, and as such, I felt it was spoiling the picture.

"I am so sorry," she chuckled. "I know this is all wrong. I ought to be sitting with a revolver concealed in my belt, and a bottle of chloroform handy. I'll tell you more, very soon, but for the moment you must be content to wait. Don't be annoyed; you don't know how grateful I am to you for having come along."

The sight of Gyp, in her crimson frock, which gleamed with dull silver embroidery, sitting up on the divan like a Buddha, made my pulses beat, and I bent down and kissed the beautiful, passionate mouth. Very wrong of course, and I ought to have been ashamed of myself. "Good night," she said demurely, and, as she disappeared down the companion-way, she turned and made a gamin's grimace

at me. She was a strange mixture, and withal, as fascinating as a faun or a dryad. You never quite knew where you were with her, emotionally, at least, although I would rather have had her with me in a tight corner than any man I know.

I stumbled to bed, thoroughly pleased with life, and not altogether disliking myself. As a matter of fact I was merely a fatuous ass.

CHAPTER III

THINGS BEGIN TO HAPPEN

GREENWOOD brought my tea next morning looking somewhat puffy under the eyes, but otherwise restored to health.

“Ship’s steady, sir, and there’s a nice sparkle on the sea.”

He spoke as though the ocean were a brass fire-iron or a glass of wine. However, I was not sorry to find that the weather was calmer. I experienced a sensation of growing excitement. I felt as though I were in the middle of a Wilkie Collins novel and I was longing to turn the next page.

“Get out my brown suit,” I said. Hancock lifted his head from his berth and looked at me with a dawning gleam of suspicion in his eye, but he said nothing.

I hurried through my bath, and was up on deck several minutes before the bugle announced breakfast. The calm weather and a promise of sunshine had brought a number of people out of their enforced retirement.

They looked like half-hatched moths, or whatever it is that a moth does when it is emerging from the chrysalis stage. I did the regulation number of times round the deck and went below with a voracious appetite. I don't know why it is, but the possessor of a good appetite on board ship is as proud of it as if it were his first-born son. I glanced round the saloon in search of Gyp, and felt vaguely annoyed when she failed to put in an appearance. It is irritating to be ready and longing to play the hero's part in a drama and then to find that the leading lady has forgotten her cue. Hancock hurried through his breakfast, but I lingered over the remains of an orange, hoping to see the girl arrive.

I was both astonished and annoyed to find Gyp and Hancock established comfortably in the shelter of the Captain's cabin, even to the extent of sharing a rug.

"Good morning," I said airily, but with what I flattered myself was a touch of coldness in my tone. There is nothing so irritating as to find oneself forestalled.

Gyp smiled rather wanly. Her eyes looked heavy and she was deadly white.

"Are you ill?" I asked anxiously.

"Miss Kiknadze is not at all well," Hancock said fussily.

I should have liked to shake him. He struck me as ridiculously pompous, and he had developed a most possessive manner.

" What's the matter ? " I addressed myself exclusively to Gyp.

" I think I ate something that disagreed with me," she said. " Rather a childish thing to do, but I was unpleasantly ill all night. I feel better now, only rather stupid."

" Try and sleep," Hancock interposed ; " shut your eyes, and I'll see no one disturbs you."

She shifted herself cautiously in her chair and buried her face in the pillow. There was obviously nothing for me to do but to remove myself, which I did with much dignity—dignity which I regret to say passed quite unnoticed by both of them.

I dragged my chair to the other side of the deck, where I sat in windy isolation until an engaging flapper appeared, who begged me to join in a game of quoits. I was delighted to find a pretext for abandoning my pose of injured innocence, and I was occupied until luncheon time in a heated contest. Exercise will transform, quicker than anything else, a vile temper into one of angelic sweetness, and I felt quite at peace with the world when the tootling of the bugles summoned us to luncheon.

I strolled round to the other side of the deck quite ready to forgive Gyp, and found her sitting up in her chair, with Hancock in attendance, and a plate of soup balanced on her knee. All my ill-humour returned at the sight, and I must own I behaved like a spoilt child.

"You look like a mother-bird, Hancock, feeding its young," I said sarcastically. But the sarcasm was unheeded by him; he was far too happy.

"Miss Kiknadze is feeling better," he answered with his absurd air of importance. Gyp looked up with a glint of mischief in her eye.

"Are you feeling better?" she asked sweetly.

"I never felt so well or so pleased with life in general," I retorted, turning on my heels. I went below, and after luncheon I retired with my flapper into a corner, and spent the afternoon in a pleasing flirtation. As for Gyp and Hancock they appeared to be glued to their respective chairs.

It was just beginning to grow dusk, and I was following the general example in striding round the deck, when I heard Gyp's voice calling me. She was alone. "Mr. Hancock has gone below to fetch another rug."

“ Can I do anything for you ? ” I said stiffly.

“ Only stop being ridiculous and listen to what I am going to say,” was the answer.

This was too much.

“ I am being ridiculous, am I ? ” I said bitterly ; “ my mistake, I suppose, but I gathered I might have hoped to have been of some use to you should the opportunity arise, and to-day I find you engaged in a violent flirtation with that—that ass Hancock.”

The grey eyes flashed.

“ There are different ways of helping me,” she said sharply. “ Do you suppose we want the ship to realise that we are allies ? ”

The pronoun “ we ” mollified me slightly.

“ Oh,” I said rather lamely, “ I’m sorry if I’ve been an ass, and I’m more sorry that you’ve been seedy.”

She gave me one of her quick smiles.

“ It’s all right,” she murmured, “ but listen to what I want to tell you before Allan Hancock comes back. He’s so unconscious that he’s a blind, poor dear. Look here ! I didn’t eat anything that disagreed with me, at least not in the way you thought. It was some poisoned chocolate that upset me.”

“ Poisoned chocolate ! ” I ejaculated.

She nodded. "I'd been eating a piece before dinner, and before I went to bed I finished it—well, I thought it was the same piece. As a matter of fact someone had substituted a bit that was nicely doped. Luckily I tasted something odd the minute I had swallowed it. So I resorted to strenuous methods. That's why I haven't been quite my bright self to-day. But the point is this ; it's just as I thought. Someone is on my track. It may be the person I am following, or it may be someone else. I'm inclined to think it is someone else, as I am practically certain they don't know whom I suspect."

"You definitely suspect someone then ? " I asked, a little surprised.

"Very much so," was the answer.

"Why can't you have them arrested ? " I said.

"I can the moment I am sure that it is in their possession. But if they are not actually carrying it about, you may be sure that it is not left where anyone is going to find it. And if I have them arrested and I can prove nothing, it will only put them on their guard."

"Whom do you suspect ? " I asked curiously.

Gyp opened her lips, but at that

moment Hancock returned, carrying a large rug.

"Thank you so much," she said in a formal voice, "but you see Mr. Hancock has brought me his."

I walked away, feeling a good deal happier now that things had been explained to me, and extremely pleased and excited with the part I was playing.

Dinner was not very well attended; the sea was rising again, and the fiddles were on the tables.

"You're in for a nice time," the Captain chuckled. "It's a bit choppy now, so we shall have quite a doing in the Gulf of Lyons."

"As I can't swim," said a woman who sat opposite me, "I can only hope that we shall keep afloat."

"I'll come and warn you in good time, Miss Fergus," the Captain said solemnly, "if we are in danger of shipwreck."

The woman gave a quizzical smile. She was a source of constant joy to our table; rain or fine, morning or evening, she wore a brown fur tippet that must once have been a fine cat. It was rumoured she had been seen going to the bath with the fur still draping her shoulders. She told us she had been saving up for this trip for years, and

that at last she was going to see Algiers. "Anyhow, this will be the last of your troubles," the Captain said, "as you leave us at Marseilles. I must say that I am quite annoyed if the first day out from Tilbury we get a calm sea. I like the passengers to be confined to their berths. It gives us time to get things shipshape."

There was a general outcry, and the Captain made his escape laughing: people broke up into groups of twos and threes, and I went on deck.

The promenade deck was shut in by an awning, and the light gleamed on the streams of water where the spray had broken across the bulwarks. Turning a corner, I ran into Gyp, her black hair blown across her face under her hood.

"Nice suitable shoes," I said with biting sarcasm, glancing at her small velvet slippers with red heels.

"You should never be a slave to convention," she said laughing. "If I felt like wearing scarlet heels in the middle of the Sahara Desert, I should do so without the slightest hesitation."

We leant against the bulwarks, and I caught a breath of the strange amber perfume that she used as a strand of her hair blew across my face.

“ My prey is going to Algiers,” she said in a low voice.

“ There seem to be a number of people going in that direction,” I remarked, “ including ‘ Puss ! ’ ”

“ Who is Puss ? ”

“ Oh, you must know her ; she sits opposite me and always wears a brown fur of dubious origin, hence her nickname.”

Gyp laughed softly, but uncontrollably.

“ Do you know who she is ? ” she asked.

“ Her name’s Miss Fergus——”

“ And ‘ Miss ’ a good many other things I fancy.” She lowered her voice. “ That’s the woman I’m following.”

“ That old thing ? ” I said.

“ She’s not as old as you think, and do try and disabuse your young mind of the idea that an agent is necessarily young and beautiful,” Gyp pleaded. “ You get that point of view from story-books, and I can assure you that you’re absolutely wrong. ‘ Puss ’ is probably old in crime and wise in vice.”

“ But how do you know,” I objected, “ that she is in possession of the formula ? ”

Gyp rapped her red-heel shoes against the deck impatiently. “ If I *knew*,” she said, “ I shouldn’t be here talking to you.”

"But," I began again, "why has she got a passport if you are doubtful of her?"

"Have you never heard that if you give a person enough rope they will hang themselves?" She wrapped the scarlet cloak round her, and waved her hand to me.

"I'm off to bed," she said, yawning, "I could do with a good night's sleep."

A few minutes later I went below to fetch a book. In the narrow cabin-way which separated our two cabins I stumbled upon Gyp. Greenwood was bending over her with a face of concern.

"The young lady came an awful cropper," he said, looking up. "I thought she'd have knocked herself silly against the bulkhead. One of the mischievous children, I'll be bound." He held up a piece of string as he spoke. "This was tied across the step. It can't have been done long, because I've been in your cabin tidying your clothes, sir. Luckily I was; I 'eard a noise and caught her, so to speak, as she fell." His round face looked quite worried.

"It's all right," Gyp said faintly. "I'm only a little shaken."

I dispatched Greenwood for some brandy, and pulled the girl to her feet. She was lithe and supple, and in half a minute she had pulled herself together.

“ Was it children ? ” I hazarded.

She shook her head.

“ No, another little effort on the principle of ‘ If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.’ No. Honestly, I don’t want any brandy. Good night.”

The cabin door closed behind her softly.

CHAPTER IV

A LITTLE DETECTIVE WORK

I FOUND Gyp on the deck when we arrived in Marseilles. Hitherto I had only seen her in rough jerseys and short skirts, the universal uniform of ship-board life.

I am no good at describing women's clothes, but I know that she looked radiant. She had a close-fitting cap of some dark red stuff with little silver wings, and a dark brown coat and skirt. Strictly speaking, I suppose that her skin was not really good. To me it was her greatest charm. It was a warm tan, with that peculiar smoothness which dark skins seem to possess in such a marked degree. The contrast between her great grey eyes and the dusky flush of her cheeks was fascinating, and I never saw her look as though she needed powder, which is what, in nine cases out of ten, ruins a woman's appearance.

It was a glorious sunny morning with a little bite in the air.

“ Do you feel strong enough to face what the gods may have in store for us ? ”

She spoke lightly, but there was an under-current of seriousness in her voice.

“ Have you any idea,” I asked, “ why she is choosing Algiers ? ”

“ I have my suspicions,” Gyp said. “ She may not know that *I* am following her, but she knows there will be a rigorous search made for the missing paper. The main idea of this game is to pass on anything incriminating as soon as possible. It is like football ; it is bad play to hang on to the ball too long. Probably she knows nothing about the nature of the document that she is carrying ; agents are told very little as a rule. They are given a certain job to do and, having done it, their part in the game is finished. In this instance, I expect her business is to pass on the paper to a certain person at a given place, and so it will be carried to its destination by relays of agents. But I suspect that she will be handing it to someone important. Algeria is a hotbed of intrigue, and although I have some very good friends amongst the French, you know how impossible they are to deal with in many ways. They will always make things easy for any agent who is working against us.”

I nodded. “ Jealousy, I suppose ; they

have proved themselves very difficult allies in the Near East. Do you think that she won't guess that you are following her?" I suggested.

"She is bound to, in time," Gyp said, "but it won't matter. It may even rattle her sufficiently to cause her to make a false move. She is on the jump already. If she were in any 'service' that I were running I'd sack her, but the Bolshevist espionage is not a very 'going' concern. It is too mixed."

"Then the people who stole the formula and murdered the King's Messenger were Bolshies?" I said rather blankly.

"I suppose you thought it was a German coup," Gyp said, "but there's not much doing in that quarter at present. Most of the activity comes from Russian influence. It makes it all the more difficult to fight. People who would have died rather than help Germany don't realise that Communism is far more dangerous. Illiterate people see in it a new religion, which is going to bring happiness and wealth to the masses. A millennium in fact, instead of horror and chaos unimaginable."

"We've got a whole day here, haven't we?" I asked, "and we've only got to get our passports viséd. Which hotel shall we go to?"

“ We’ll see first of all where the Fergus woman goes, and then choose another, and, by the way, you’d better stay at hers and report to me.”

“ Thank goodness we shake Hancock off here,” I said fervently.

“ Not till to-morrow. The ship sails at ten, and he and I are dining together to-night.”

“ Well, if you must, you must,” I grumbled. “ I’m sure he’ll try and make love to you.”

“ Probably,” she said calmly ; “ don’t look so pained,” she added a little impatiently. “ Do you suppose because I do this sort of work that I cease to be human ? I’ve always played fair ; I’ve never used love as a means to gain information ; I never mix business and pleasure—but beyond that my life is my own.”

She broke off abruptly, and I felt my heart beating a trifle unsteadily. She looked so attractive, standing in the bright sunshine, her cheeks flushed and her breath coming quickly.

“ I’ve arranged to meet Allan Hancock at one,” she said, “ and I want you to come with me to the Prefecture of Police. There’s a little business we must do there first.”

"I see," I remarked amiably, "I get the kicks and Hancock gets the ha'pence."

"If you like to put it like that, certainly," Gyp said, "but either we are going to work together in this affair, or we aren't. I told you just now, I never mix business and pleasure."

I became suddenly ashamed of my behaviour and said so. The girl laid her hand on my arm and smiled, and when she smiled, it was hard to feel anything but gay.

We disembarked and rattled up the stony and odoriferous quay. The Prefecture was a large white building with an imposing entrance. Gyp walked up to the first gendarme we saw.

"M. Boujault commands here now, does he not?" she asked. The gendarme bowed.

"Please take him this card," she said, slipping it into an envelope.

"Monsieur is much occupied," he objected.

Gyp shrugged her shoulders as one who would say, "I am desolate, but what would you?" The man disappeared and returned almost immediately.

"M. Boujault begs that you will give yourself the trouble of mounting," he announced.

We toiled up seven flights of stairs—the trouble of mounting was not a mere figure of

speech—and stopped, breathless and somewhat heated, in front of a blue door. The gendarme threw it open and we marched in.

A fat little man bounded to his feet and bounded towards Gyp. He was so plump and round that he bounced like an india-rubber ball. I wanted to throw him down and see if he would bounce up again.

"My dear mademoiselle," he exclaimed, seizing her hand and looking as if he were going to eat it ; then he glanced towards me.

"This is Lord Warburton," Gyp said, "an English gentleman who is kindly helping me in the business I have in hand. *Monsieur*

M. Boujault inclined himself in my direction, then bounced back like an india-rubber band towards Gyp. "Helping you," he said softly. "No, mademoiselle, that I cannot believe ; you have never needed help."

"Perhaps I am not as young as I was," she suggested, "anyhow, it is the truth."

M. Boujault rang the bell.

"Coffee and liqueurs," he ordered. Gyp shook her finger at him. "When we were working together liqueurs were not permitted before *déjeuner*," she said sternly. The fat man looked like a penitent child. "Just this once, in honour of your arrival," he pleaded, and Gyp laughed.

"Will you have your dossier of suspects

searched," she asked, "to see if the name of Frida Fergus is amongst them? She is of Swedish birth, naturalised English."

The bell was again rung, and a gendarme appeared instantaneously. "I also want to know," she added, "at which hotel in the town she is going to stop."

"Search our list of suspects for the name of 'Frida Fergus,'" M. Boujault said, "and have the hotels informed that her arrival has to be instantly telephoned to me."

"I apologise," Gyp said, "for not doing my own tiresome work, but I ventured, for the sake of old times, to trespass on your kindness."

M. Boujault threw up his hands in horror. "I should have been pained indeed," he protested, "if Mademoiselle Gyp had had to find out this trivial detail. One does not expect a great artist to clean his own palette."

At this moment the coffee and liqueurs appeared, and I must confess that they were delicious. M. Boujault must have been a connoisseur in other things beside espionage.

"May I be permitted to learn the nature of your work?" he inquired presently.

Gyp gave him a detailed account to which he listened carefully. "Can you suggest any improvement in my plans?" she asked.

“ Listen to her,” he said, turning to me. “ Listen to mademoiselle, asking me for advice—me, who worked with her and who marvelled at her for six months. Was she not a thorn in the side of the German Intelligence ? Did they not put a price upon her head ! Has she not recounted to you how she discovered the Boche who was flying the English aeroplane. How——”

“ Hush, my friend,” Gyp interrupted, “ all that is ancient history. Luck was often with me, and the day may yet come when my luck fails.”

“ If luck consists in the most marvellous courage, in the most unceasing devoting——” but the girl, laughing, put her hand over his mouth. “ If you speak another word of nonsense I shall leave,” she said, and the little man was silent.

“ Do I not remember an Arab, by name Achami, who brought you news of importance about certain affairs connected with German influence amongst the Touaregs ? ” Gyp asked. “ I remember at the time that you said he had done good work.”

“ *Quelle memoire,*” sighed M. Boujault, raising his hands, but he dared rhapsodise no further.

“ You are perfectly right, mademoiselle ; he came from near Touggourt. I will have his dossier prepared for you.”

"He might be useful," she said thoughtfully, and at that moment there came a knock at the door.

The same gendarme entered and handed M. Boujault a piece of paper. "Ah!" the latter said, "Miss Fergus is at the Hotel du Rome." Gyp looked pleased.

"When she comes to have her passport viséd, will you detain her and let Lord Warburton know by telephone at the Hotel du Rome? There is a little work I want to do, it might save us a journey to Algeria, though I doubt it; still, it's worth trying. And will you send a gendarme with me to the Hotel du Rome?"

The little man bowed, and as Gyp rose he bounded towards the door. "Would you do me the honour of taking *déjeuner* with me before you leave?" he pleaded humbly.

Gyp smiled.

"The honour will be mine," she said, "we worked too long together for me not to realise that if it had not been for you the German Intelligence might not have found itself checkmated so often and so decisively."

M. Boujault stammered something in reply, but there were tears in his eyes.

Gyp turned to me as we went down the stairs.

"I must apologise for the little man's

absurd remarks about me, but the fact is, I once got him out of a nasty scrape. I knew he was a good man with a brilliant brain, and I didn't want to see him go down for want of a helping hand. Ever since, he has made an idol of me, and it is impossible to check his flow of reminiscences.”

We passed down the Rue du Rome, where the flowers were stacked in high bunches round the small kiosks. They made a brilliant splash of colour.

“ Which will you have ? ” I asked, stopping in front of one of the most brilliant displays.

“ For me ? ” Gyp said in surprise, “ how nice of you ; I adore flowers.” She was like a child in her pleasure—she chose a bunch of carnations ; when she discovered their price, she put them down and took some anemones.

“ No,” she said, shaking her head, “ I hate money being wasted, and especially on me.”

“ I thought we agreed never to mix business and pleasure,” I argued, “ and this pleasure is mine.”

She gave a little chuckle.

“ Well, anyhow, you are not going to be cheated over them,” and she addressed the flower-girl in a voluble flow of pure Marseillaise. “ She thought we were both English,”

she said as she tucked the flowers in her coat.

“I want you to go to the Hotel du Rome now, and have your luncheon there,” she said, “in case the Fergus woman should elect to go straight off to the Prefecture. I’ll be back in three-quarters of an hour. Do you mind?”

I would have minded nothing when she looked at me like that, and I went off to the hotel, ordered luncheon, and sat down to wait for a telephone message.

CHAPTER V

I MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF

THE rough weather we had for the last few days had made it difficult to get a good night's sleep, and M. Boujiault's liqueur had been rather potent. I fell asleep after lunch, in an arm-chair, and was only awakened by a *garçon* shaking me repeatedly, and shouting that I was wanted on the telephone.

It was M. Boujiault himself who was speaking.

"Please tell Mademoiselle that the baggage is here, and will be detained until I hear further." He rang off, and Gyp came into the hall.

"Good," she said, when I told her, "I wonder if the gendarme is here."

"Won't the Fergus woman be suspicious when she finds she is detained?" I suggested.

Gyp shook her head. "She will only think that there is a large crowd of passports to be attended to. She won't realise that she is being kept on purpose."

There was a man in plain clothes standing near the bureau, and Gyp stopped beside him and lighted a cigarette.

I could hardly hear her voice, but the man walked into the office and in a few moments Gyp followed him casually.

"Let me see, which is my key?" she said aloud.

"Number twenty-seven, mademoiselle," the clerk announced, handing her the key. She took it and went towards the lift. I waited till it was out of sight, then I walked leisurely up the stairs. The door of twenty-seven was barely ajar; I looked round hastily and slipped in, bolting it behind me.

"We can take our time," Gyp said. "I don't suppose for a minute that I shall find the formula, but it is just possible that I might find something to convince me that I am on the right track."

"You're not certain then?" I asked.

"I'm acting on the principle of elimination," she explained. "Frida Fergus was the mistress of Vladimir Ivanovitch, who is now one of the most prominent Bolshevist leaders. She was never proved to be actively engaged on espionage, but of course she was suspect, owing to her association with him. It was a queer liaison, and the affection was mostly on her side. You think she's got

no charm, but she can look very attractive when she takes the trouble, and her brain power is remarkable.”

“ I thought you said she was no good as an agent,” I interrupted.

“ No ! but that’s a thing apart,” Gyp said ; “ it’s like having a brain for cards, or a gift for languages. Anyhow, Ivanovitch got tired of her, and they both disappeared. We lost trace of him for some time, and then he was seen in France. Certainly she had been in England for some weeks before the theft of the paper took place. My theory is that Vladimir Ivanovitch bribed her to steal the paper, by promising to take her back if she succeeded in getting hold of it. She was crazy about him ; that type of brain often goes with a most violent temperament. She had a child by him, which died, and she went nearly mad when he left her. She would do anything in the world to get him back.”

“ I’d never have dreamed that she’d had a romance in her life,” I exclaimed.

“ You’re much too apt to judge by appearances,” Gyp was opening various boxes noiselessly and deftly, turning over the contents without disarranging them in the slightest degree.

“ I hate this sort of business,” she said

briefly, "however, one can't make omelettes without breaking eggs. Frida Fergus is a nasty customer to tackle. She is so much in love that personal danger means nothing to her, provided she can do what Vladimir asks. Personally, I don't suppose for a minute that he will keep his promise to her."

"I can't see this man wanting her now," I expostulated, "she's a bit long in the tooth, surely."

"Poor devil," Gyp said bitterly, "she slaved for that man for five years, and now she's staking her last chance of happiness on his word. Who'd be a woman?"

"There are women and women," I said, but she paid no attention. She had scrambled to her feet and was listening intently. "There is someone at the door," she whispered.

I crept across the room and pushed the bolt back noiselessly. I flung the door open, and as I did so a figure disappeared round the corner of the passage. I raced after the apparition, but when I reached the stairs there was no one to be seen except Greenwood, who was coming up with some clean clothes under his arm.

"Did someone pass you just now?" I asked breathlessly.

"Only the chambermaid, sir," he said in

some surprise, " she was coming downstairs in a great hurry."

I returned to Gyp, whom I found in the passage. The door of number twenty-seven was shut behind her, and she was some way off, lighting a cigarette. I told her what Greenwood had said.

" Well, there's nothing in her boxes that will help us," she said. " Of course, if I'm on the wrong track, the game's up."

" You mean if she hasn't got the paper ? "

" Yes. Still, sometimes one must trust to one's instinct. It's right, more often than not."

" Why can't you arrest her on chance ? "

I asked.

" Because if I did it's a thousand to one against finding what I want. Agents don't carry secret documents in their pockets. No, I must follow her till she meets the next link in the chain. There is only one person, I think, to whom she will give it, and he is not in France."

Gyp went slowly down the stairs, and gave the plain-clothed man an almost imperceptible nod.

" Frida will be free to have her passport viséd now," she said.

" I *wish* I had been in time to see who it was that was outside the door," I grumbled.

‘Never mind,’ the girl consoled me. ‘I’m too old to do detective work at my time of life. I’ll get Boujiault to have her watched while we’re here, and we can amuse ourselves. We shall have enough hard work when we get to Algeria.’

I looked at my watch. It was about three o’clock.

‘I’m going to spend a thoroughly civilised and feminine afternoon,’ Gyp yawned. ‘I shall have my hair shampooed and I shall have the most expensive ‘friction’ I can find; then a little massage, and finish up with a manicure.’

‘You’re dining with Hancock, aren’t you?’ I asked.

I had got over my initial fit of jealousy. I realised as well as she did, that it is impossible to mix business and pleasure, but it was difficult to spend any length of time with Gyp Kiknadze and not be fascinated by her.

She was intensely feminine and unusually temperamental, yet she possessed the power of subordinating everything to the matter in hand. I have seen her concentrated for over an hour on a problem, and then push the whole concern out of her head, and become utterly and adorably frivolous. Her courage was cold and hard, like blue-tempered steel.

She knew, and had experienced too much to underestimate danger, but she faced it like the thoroughbred she was.

" Yes, I'm dining with Allan," Gyp said in answer to my question, " but we'll all go to some show afterwards. I see Ninette Dubois's playing here. I used to know her well in the old days ; I'll get a box from her. Let's meet at the Femina Theatre at seven-thirty."

" Right you are," I said. " Where are you staying ? "

" Hotel du Louvre ; the bath water's hot there, but that's about all that can be said for it."

She waved her hand and disappeared through the swing door.

I reflected that if Gyp intended to spend the afternoon in embellishing her appearance, I might follow her example. My hair distinctly needed cutting, and my nails bore traces of various contacts with the deck during the stormy weather on the *Nankin*. As I was making my way to the bureau to ask the name of the best hairdresser, Frida Fergus came into the hotel. Looking at her more closely, I could see that Gyp was right, and that she might once have been attractive. Her dark eyes were still lovely, but her face was lined and

drawn, and her hair was dull and strained back from her forehead. But she still had a beautiful line from chin to throat, and she held herself well. She smiled on seeing me, and though I looked at her sharply, I could see nothing in her face to suggest that she suspected anything.

"I'm looking for a hairdresser," I said casually.

"I know Marseilles pretty well," the answer came quickly, "there is a very good *coiffeur* in the Rue de Papere. I am on my way there myself. Shall we go together?"

I was not used to the game in those days, and somehow I didn't care for the idea of talking with a woman whose boxes I had just been helping to rifle.

We reached the hairdresser in five minutes and Frida left me in the hands of the barber while she went to have her nails manicured. I heard her leave the shop and two minutes later the assistant made her appearance.

"*Monsieur désire une manucure?*" she questioned, and I nodded my head.

Unlike the majority of the Marseillaises, she was very fair, with a skin like a Devonshire girl and a full pouting mouth. She was an alluring little bit of goods, and when my nails were finished I felt quite sorry.

“ Monsieur will now go and have the ‘ five o’clock ? ’ ” she asked as she began putting away the manicure things.

“ I suppose I might as well,” I said vaguely. I had nothing to do till half-past seven, and it was a good way of putting in time.

“ Where is the best place to go ? ”

“ There is a shop where Monsieur can get excellent tea, but it is not in the fashionable quarter. I could show Monsieur the way.” The hint was too palpable to be ignored.

“ If you will do me the honour of having tea with me,” I said in my best French, “ I will accept your kind guidance.”

She dimpled all over.

“ The pleasure is mine, monsieur,” and she disappeared to return a moment later in an extremely becoming hat. We set out together, and to tell the truth, I felt rather like a truant schoolboy.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROCESS IS FINISHED FOR ME

THE tea-shop to which Madeleine—the little girl's name—took me was certainly not in a fashionable quarter. It took us twenty minutes' hard walking to reach it.

It was situated in a dingy street of unprepossessing appearance. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating, as you say," Madeleine remarked in pretty broken English, as she pushed open the door. We stumbled up some stairs and into a room which was nearly dark. She fumbled for a switch, and in a moment the room was flooded with light. I almost gasped with surprise. I had expected the ordinary type of continental tea-room, with bamboo tables and little check covers. But this room was large and lofty. It must have been dark, as it looked on to a blank wall, but once it was lighted up the effect was surprising.

The walls were covered with oriental striped material—blue purple and red stripes,

giving the effect of some rich mosaic. All round the walls was a low couch, covered with purple silk, and cushions in shot tissue lay scattered about at intervals. The lights were softened by large shields of tortoiseshell supported with gold chains on which were threaded huge lumps of turquoise matrix.

It seemed impossible to believe that this room was in the middle of the dingy little street which I had just left. Madeleine noticed my surprise and laughed.

"It is not what Monsieur expected, *hein* ! But you'll be very discreet and I will tell you the truth. The *patron*, Monsieur Charles, is my very good friend, and he has a tea-shop below, where he gives tea. But for me and any friend I bring he allows me the use of this room, which is where he has—on the quiet, you understand—some little amusement, such as *chemin-de-fer*, or *baccarat*. But that is not an affair of which we speak."

Her occasional use of English slang was irresistible, and I burst out laughing. She rang the bell and when a *garçon* appeared ^{boy} she ordered tea. "English tea, mind," she said, "made with boiling water and strong, as for me, a cup of chocolate. Tea is all very well as a *tisane*, when one is ill or *énervée*, but as a beverage, no, I thank you."

She made a little *moue* of disgust, and spreading out her skirts, perched herself upon the divan like a small bird. I lit a cigarette and smoked lazily, but this did not suit my little friend, and she came nearer, and placed one small hand upon my knee.

"You are distrait, *hein*!" she said. "Of whom are you thinking?"

"You," I lied, trying to rise to the occasion, and failing badly.

She only laughed. "One does not think so earnestly of those who are sitting next one: then is the time for acting." She snuggled up to me, and I took the little bunch of frills and silk stockings on my knee and kissed the red lips. She gave an appreciative little wriggle.

The *garçon* brought in tea; apparently he was used to such scenes, and remained unmoved. I paid the bill, which was a preposterous one: M. Charles evidently did not lend his room for nothing. Madeleine sipped her chocolate, and I drank the strong, sweet tea. I was getting bored, and I glanced surreptitiously at my watch. It was past six, and I thought it was about time to make a move. Madeleine must have guessed my intention, for she slipped off my knee.

“ Will you kiss me before you go ? ” she said softly. She was a nice little thing, and I picked her up in my arms.

“ I want a *crème-de-menthe*,” she whispered in my ear, like a small girl asking for a sweet.

“ My dear child,” I said. “ You’ll be sick drinking that stuff on top of your chocolate,” but she shook her head obstinately. I resigned myself to another wait, and ordered the liqueur. She sipped a little of it, then set the glass down on the table in front of us and began humming to herself under her breath. The melody was dreaming and haunting, and I felt myself growing drowsy. I looked at the green *crème-de-menthe*, and it seemed to be miles away, glowing like an emerald lake. The air was hot and heavy, and impregnated with some curious spicy smell. I felt myself growing more sleepy, then I heard a voice say, “ Look at the green, look at the green.” Something stronger than myself was impelling me. I gazed into the emerald depths, till I felt as though I were drowning in the haunting colour. Everything swam round me in waves of blissful oblivion. Far, far away, I heard a voice say, “ I must leave you ; you are very sleepy.” Then the strange, compelling power seemed to grow more insisting, and the last thing my closing eyes saw was the

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wavering light of the *crème-de-menthe* now
gleaming like a huge emerald sun.

I might have been asleep or in a trance, whichever the state was into which I slipped, for hours or minutes. I came to, quite quickly, although my brain seemed numb and aching at the same time, like a muscle feels after unaccustomed exercise. I was lying on a couch, and the air was chilly and dank. There was very little light, and I heard round me a murmur of voices. I felt too slack and exhausted to move, and I would have been content to remain there for hours. All memory of the past seemed to have left me, and the very idea of active thought was agony. I lay and listened to the voices, feeling utterly at rest. Presently there was a movement behind my couch, and someone came forward and lifted my eyelids. I felt too lazy to protest; all I wanted was to be left in peace.

"He is ready," a voice said, and a white-robed figure stood in front of me. Very slowly the wonderful sense of lassitude in which I was wrapped gave way to a feeling of discomfort. I can only compare it to the physical sensation of an electric shock. My mind prickled and stung, and was forced to rouse itself. I wanted never to think again, and I found myself forced

to marshal my thoughts and direct their progress.

More especially did I find myself thinking of Gyp, and of her mission, and suddenly I realised that I had no knowledge of where she kept the formula of the essential factor which was the keystone of the whole discovery. This roused in me a curious sense of irritation, and I began thinking of all the places, likely and unlikely, where it might be hidden. All this time I was practically unconscious of my surroundings ; I can only describe it by telling you that I was a swimmer in a heavy sea, my consciousness was immersed in waves of thought, over which I had no control. But now the atmosphere seemed to change, and a more direct personal element was introduced.

The white-robed figure drew nearer, and kneeling down, placed its face on a level with mine. I say " its " face, because it was swathed in white from head to foot, and only the eyes were visible. But those eyes burned into my very soul with a blue glare like the biting flash of steel. I writhed in almost physical agony, but I could not drop my eyelids ; some force, stronger even than my fear, upheld them.

The figure was silent, not a sound broke the stillness, only the gleam of those eyes

seared through and through me. At last, when the torture had become almost unbearable, "it" spoke, and I almost sobbed at the relief.

"You know," the voice said, "where Gyp Kiknadze keeps the formula of the missing factor."

"No," I said, truthfully enough.

There was another silence, then I felt the blue glare of those awful eyes searching out my innermost consciousness.

"Not again," I said hoarsely. "My God, not again; I swear to you I don't know."

The figure moved away, and I shut my eyes, panting for breath. This sounds fantastic enough now, but then it was too horribly real to seem strange. I had lost all sense of time and place; I only knew that I was being tortured to force me to reveal something of which I had no knowledge. I lay with my eyes closed, to pray against hope that I should find it was only a nightmare. Suddenly a single note of music sounded through the room. I don't know if it came from a violin, or from some other instrument. It dropped like a stone in a pool, in the utter quiet. Some nerve in me vibrated to it, just as you hear a guitar string thrum when a note is struck on the piano. It was not unpleasant, but it was

uncanny. I lay still, and presently another note thrilled through the room.

Have you ever felt the dentist's machine slip and the point of the drill touch a nerve? If so, you will realise something of what I felt. I leapt in the air, and the pain went through me like a needle. Then the sound died away and I sank back. I looked round, but the room was empty. It was not the place where I had had tea; this looked like a cellar. The walls were bare, and the floor was uneven and damp. I staggered to my feet and looked for a way of escape. As I did so the same note hummed again, and I fell on my knees moaning.

At the back of my brain I felt the relentless pressure beginning again, and I knew that my only hope was to answer the question which the unseen powers were asking. I thanked Heaven that I was ignorant, I was too stunned, too horror-struck to wonder what devilish power had me in its clutches. I knew vaguely that Russia was as full of mysticism and mystery as the East, but I knew nothing more than what I had heard and read.

I felt the compelling force grow stronger and stronger, and if I had known the answer to the question I would have shouted it aloud. Gradually the motive power died

away, and again peace and stillness reigned. Then, as suddenly as before, came that awful note. But before the agony of the vibration had had time to cease it was succeeded by another, and yet another, each of which lacerated the nerve which responded to it until I shrieked. The unspeakable torture went on, and my cries became inhuman howls as the notes dropped up and down the register. "Hark how the dog howls in tune," I heard a voice say mockingly through the mist of pain and terror which surrounded me.

Then the agony stopped, and I felt waves of drowsy peace sweep across my brain. Like some insidious drug it lulled my senses, and I dropped into oblivion.

When I opened my eyes I found myself sitting upright in the room where I had had tea, and in front of me stood the glass which had contained the *crème de menthe*, but quite empty.

Madeleine was lying curled up like a kitten on the divan, showing a pair of very pretty silk-clad legs. She woke up as I moved, and yawned.

"*Tu as bien dormi, chérie?*" she asked, "*Moi, aussi, j'avais sommeil.*" She looked perfectly unconcerned and very alluring, but I shrank from her in a kind of horror.

I looked at my watch. It was seven o'clock, and I felt as though years had elapsed since I entered that house.

We went downstairs, and aching in every limb, I hailed a *fiacre* and drove Madeleine to some street of which I have forgotten the name. We parted amicably, in fact the kiss she bestowed upon me was extremely warm. I crawled into the lounge of the Hotel du Louvre and telephoned upstairs to ask Gyp to see me. In a few moments I was knocking at her door.

CHAPTER VII

OF LOVE AND OTHER THINGS

I HEARD a muffled voice mutter something indistinct, and I went in.

Gyp was standing in front of the looking-glass with her mouth full of hair-pins, and a barbaric kind of dressing-gown of brocade and fur wrapped round her.

There was a large fire, and the comfort and saneness of it, compared with what I had just left, was balm to my nerves. She turned round slowly, but at the sight of my face she threw down her brush and came towards me. "Don't talk yet, my dear," she said quietly but rather quickly, "there's all the evening in which to tell me about it. Lie down."

She pushed me on to a big couch, and threw a fur rug over me. I collapsed with more haste than dignity on to the cushions, and I closed my eyes with a sudden access of giddiness. Everything swam round me, and I lay still, not daring to speak. Presently I felt the rim of a glass against my teeth, as

she forced some brandy between my lips. I felt her cool, capable fingers on my wrist. "Lie still," she whispered. "You're not going to faint?"

"No," I said weakly, "but I think I'm going to be sick."

She laughed, and her laugh was one of the most delightful things about her. "How romantic!" she said. "No wonder you feel sick, if you've been inhaling much of the unpleasant scent that clings to your coat."

She slipped it off me deftly and put something cold on my forehead and some salts under my nose. I took a deep breath, and nearly choked. The tears came into my eyes and I struggled to sit up. "Lie down for a few moments longer," Gyp said persuasively, "while I finish dressing. I can put on my dress now I am sure you are neither going to be ill nor faint."

She slipped into a gold tissue gown, while I watched her sleepily, then she rang the bell.

"I am going to make you drink a little soup before I leave you. Afterwards you can join us at the theatre or not, as you like." She gave the order to the waiter when he appeared, and she drew up a chair and sat beside me. I was feeling better,

and also rather ashamed of myself for having given way, but the horror of that afternoon was still with me.

"What happened?" she asked, laying her hand on my arm.

"How do you know anything happened?" I parried.

"One does not dash into a young woman's room with a face like yours, *mon cher*,"

"I am sorry I was such a fool," I said, "but I've been badly frightened."

I told her the story, and even the mere recital of the horrors made my flesh creep.

"So," said Gyp when I had finished, "that woman is no fool, and she has good agents working for her. I take back what I said about her being useless at espionage."

"Do you think she had a hand in it?" I asked.

"She directed you to that hairdresser's shop, and once there it was only a matter of time. The little girl was the decoy."

I bit my lip; it was depressing to think how easily I had been trapped.

"Why did they let me go?" I asked.

"They were clever enough to realise that so far you were not in possession of the

information that they wanted, and they were afraid of any publicity such as would arise if you were missed. I thought something like this might happen, that is why I have been so uncommunicative."

" You don't trust me very far," I said bitterly, then I thought of those diabolical notes of music, and I was silent. What would have happened if I had known !

Mon ami," Gyp said gently, " I wouldn't trust myself if I fell into their hands."

" What do you think the means were that they used ? " I asked after a moment's silence.

" There are more things in Heaven and Earth . . ." she quoted. " I have lived too much among Russians to doubt anything. Their powers are almost supernatural. Have you heard how some among them have the ' word ' against bleeding, and some again the ' word ' against burning. It is no mere fancy. I have seen a man cut an artery, and another man was there who knew the ' word,' and after he had repeated the formula the bleeding stopped instantaneously."

I stared incredulously, then I remembered the blue glare of those eyes, and nothing seemed too wild or too fantastic to believe.

"This is not going to be an easy task," Gyp said presently. "I don't want to drag you into an affair of this sort without warning you. It's going to be difficult and dangerous."

"Not more so for me than for you," I pleaded.

"It's my job," she answered, and her face grew weary. Then she laughed as though mocking her own weakness. "Up to date, I should say that it's you who have had the trials and tribulations, not me. Drink this soup while it's hot, and then lie down and have a sleep."

"Won't they think it rather odd if they find out that I am in your room?" I suggested.

"You've got a suburban mind," she retorted. "What can they think if I am not here? Anyhow, it won't be the first time people have thought things about me, and it won't be the last. Keep quiet here for a bit and then meet us later at the theatre. Ninette will give us supper afterwards. I must go; the miserable Allan has been waiting half an hour."

She looked lovely in her shimmering tissue, with the firelight catching the gleam of red in her dark hair. I thought of how much she had already gone through, and of the

dangers which surrounded her, and I marvelled again at her courage.

" All right," I promised, " I'll meet you in about an hour and a half."

* * * * *

I lay and watched the firelight flickering across the ceiling, making fantastic shadows on the walls. It was warm and comfortable, and there was just a hint of the amber scent that Gyp used still floating in the air. I shifted restlessly once or twice on the couch and shut my eyes.

Of course I was in love with Gyp, but my love had not yet reached the painful stage. She attracted me physically, and her careless courage roused my admiration, but my love was still at that pleasant point where emotion, not affection, was the dominant factor.

I opened my eyes lazily and looked at the dancing shadows as they played across the wall in fantastic procession. One shadow in particular aroused my curiosity. It was strangely life-like, and looked like the figure of a man in miniature. I could not conceive what object in the room it could be that cast this likeness on the wall. I watched it idly for a few moments, till the outline grew more distinct.

I felt my flesh creep and my feet grow cold. What in the name of heaven was happening in this still shadowy room? What further uncanny influences were at work? I longed with a sickening intensity to cross the room and switch on the light, but I dared not move. Little drops of perspiration were standing out all over me, and I kept my eye fixed on the wall with a strained attention. Slowly the figure of a man faded away: slowly, very slowly, something else began to form upon the white background. I gazed with horror as a monstrous outline appeared, line by line, till I saw before me a gibbet, and a hanging body with drooping head and sagging limbs.

The apparition wavered in the firelight, and gave a life-like reality to the loathsome picture. I fumbled for my cigarette case; with shaking fingers I lit a match, and not till I had drawn two or three breaths did I dare open my eyes. When I did so the wall was clear.

There was a knock at the door, and the *valet-de-chambre* entered. "Mademoiselle desired that I should see if monsieur required anything from time to time."

"Just give my coat a brush," then I added casually, "I suppose the windows

are not open? I thought there seemed a draught."

No, he assured me the windows were tightly shut, but he would draw the curtains, as they were slightly open. Evidently I had been alone, and I began to wonder if my brain were giving way, and I were a victim to optical illusions. Then I realised that this was another little trick of our Bolshie friends. The idea that I could be intimidated into throwing up the job filled me with blind rage.

"Bring me a fine champagne," I said to the *valet-de-chambre*, who was still hovering about the room. I was not going to appear in front of Gyp again in a state of weak terror. I made up my mind to tell her nothing about the incident of the shadows.

I left the hotel ten minutes later and made my way to the Femina Theatre. I found Gyp, Hancock and Ninette in the box. The latter was a big, placid blonde, with a creamy voice and ravishing clothes. The French employed a good many actresses as agents, and they were adepts at picking up information.

Ninette took us back to her flat in her car, a ridiculous little chocolate-box of a coupé. Gyp produced a cigarette, and I struck a match.

"All right?" she asked softly, as she bent to light it.

I nodded.

"Don't stay late," she said, "you look fagged."

"What are you two whispering about?" Ninette asked. "I want Lord Warburton for my flirt; he looks, what do you call it in English—exciting. You must lend him to me for the evening, *chérie*."

"Birds of a feather flock together," Gyp said teasingly.

"Do you know," Hancock asked seriously—he was not blessed with any very marked sense of humour—"that you can add 'in the middle of the bed' to any proverb, and it will make sense."

"'Birds of a feather flock together in the middle of the bed,' oh shocking!" said Ninette, shrieking with joy.

"'When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do in the middle of the bed,'" I supplemented.

Gyp exploded. "I don't think, Allan, that you have a very nice mind," she said seriously.

Poor Hancock became covered with confusion. "It is quite harmless in most cases," he protested, "'a burnt child dreads the fire in the middle of the bed.'"

“ That is refined without being funny, as my father used to say,” Gyp remarked. “ I prefer the Romans.”

“ So do I,” I said conclusively, “ the Romans knew a thing or two.”

Ninette subsided into helpless giggles, which lasted till we reached her flat.

CHAPTER VIII

FRIDA FERGUS MAKES A MOVE

I LEANT against the rail of the *Maréchal Bougeaud* and watched the Spahi and Senegalese troops pouring on to the lower deck. They made a bright splash of colour with their red *képis* and vivid uniforms. The accommodation was primitive to a degree, and I shuddered at the thought of rough weather.

My own cabin was very comfortable. It was larger than those on the P. & O., and had gay chintz curtains at the porthole, and a good-sized cupboard. It was one of the few cabins on the promenade deck, and I saw from the passenger list that Gyp had another. No one else had yet arrived to occupy the other berth, and I hoped that I might be going to have it to myself. So far I had seen no sign of Gyp. Frida Fergus had passed me dressed in rusty black, wearing the inevitable fur tippet. She greeted me with the impersonal smile that she always gave me. I asked myself if she suspected

anything, or if it had been imagination on our part when we thought that someone was lurking outside the door. I watched the crowd abstractedly. I wondered where this strange adventure was going to lead me. The blood of my old freebooting Scotch ancestors ran hotly in my veins, and I thanked heaven that I was far away from the cold fogs and sluggish existence of England.

I was beginning to wonder where Gyp was, when I saw a strange procession approaching the gangway. In front walked Gyp, clutching a large camera and a small handbag, both of which were nearly torn from her grasp by gesticulating porters. Behind came Hancock, being pulled along by a small dog which bore a fleeting resemblance to a Pomeranian. It had a curly tail and prick ears, the rest of its body was decidedly of the Dachshund persuasion. The dog was straining forward to reach Gyp, and the lead kept entangling itself round people's legs. Amidst muttered curses and objurgations the trio reached the gangway and somehow tumbled on board.

“ Thank heaven, Deryk,” Gyp said, laughing, “ you're here. I thought we were going to lose the boat. Titina is rather troublesome—oh, and Allan is coming too. We

must find him a cabin, or a berth, or something."

"A berth in preference to 'something,' " Hancock said.

I felt absolutely bewildered. I had believed Allan to have left by the P. & O. that morning, and I could not think what he was doing here.

"We'll have to take it in turns to lead Titina about," Gyp announced. "I hope she won't be sick."

"Where on earth did you find her?" I asked. "Is she of any known breed?"

"Her mother was a Pomeranian who looked too long at a Dachshund," Gyp said gravely, "and I passed two boys who were trying to strangle her with a piece of string: so I hit both of them on the nose, and rescued her. And she's called Titina, because of the song '*Viens, Titina, viens mon loup*,' and I think she has a wolf-like expression, and can we get anything to eat?" she continued all in one breath. The boat was beginning to move, and there was a hurried rush for deck-chairs; the passengers all assumed that air of awaiting the worst which is so characteristic of French travellers.

I took Hancock to my cabin, and we arranged with the steward that he was to have the spare berth. "Look here," he

said, a little awkwardly, " I want to explain things a bit. I am not in this show of yours and I don't know anything about it. But Gyp has told me that if I like to come along she has no objection to my doing so. I am only a G.P. at home, but I have always wanted more than anything in the world to travel. So I made up my mind the other day to take a holiday. I quite understand that I am ' not on ' in the piece ; but that girl's worn to a thread, not that she'd admit it : she's as cool as they make 'em, but she is just a mass of nerves, and as a doctor I might be of use some time."

He ended quite out of breath. Good old Hancock, he was one of the best, and I often think of his square Saxon face with regret. He was a fighter to the last ounce, and the best of friends. As Gyp said, " If the gods had given Allan a sense of humour he'd have been too perfect, so they left it out."

" What about your passports ? " I asked.

" Gyp fixed all that up with the French. She got more than a bit of work done this morning, I can tell you. She's a marvellous girl, she's as highly-strung as a racehorse, and——" he broke off abruptly and I, who realised what he felt, said nothing further. We left the cabin and made our way to Gyp's

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state-room, where we found her busy arranging the spare berth for Titina.

"I hate to seem unsympathetic," I said, laughing, "but do you know there are several disconsolate females with nowhere to sleep?"

"Well!" she looked uncomprehendingly at me. Then it dawned upon her, and she sat down and laughed also.

"It can't be helped," she said, shaking her head. "Titina is the only female thing I'll allow in here. I paid for two berths, and I mean to keep them. What about food? There's a meal going on, I can hear the plates clattering."

"Yes; eat plenty, and keep up your strength."

Gyp turned suddenly and gave him a sharp dig in the ribs, which reduced Hancock to a state of helpless laughter. "Thank goodness, you're ticklish." She gave him another prod. "I shall have some power over you. Every time you talk platitudes like that I'll punish you. You'd be quite bearable if you never thought before you spoke. Let yourself go, for goodness sake."

"We'll be ornaments to society by the time you've finished with us," I said sarcastically.

"Well, come on," she yawned, "Titina can stay here, she'll be quite happy."

Titina, however, was of quite another opinion. Having found someone who treated her well, she was not going to lose sight of her. The moment the door was shut the dog broke into piercing howls, and a steward came up to protest. Gyp looked worried: "I can't take her below, they stand a good deal on these French boats, but they won't have dogs in the dining-saloon."

"Give her to Greenwood," I suggested, "he'll take care of her."

"She can't go down among those dirty men in the second class," Gyp protested.

"I can assure you," I said ruefully, "that I would never have dared to suggest that Greenwood should go second on this boat. He is sharing a cabin with a French colonel."

At this moment Greenwood opportunely appeared, and Titina immediately adopted him.

"Dogs always take to me," he said modestly. "I seem to 'ave a way with them."

Gyp choked a laugh into a cough, and disappeared down the companion. "Perhaps he has a way with women too," she remarked. "I saw him helping Frida with her bag."

"Giddy old thing," I said; "I believe he's got a wife and family at home. I don't

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know much about him ; he's only a stop-gap,
but he's not bad."

"He's got fascinating eyes," Gyp murmured as we sat down, "have you ever noticed them ? "

"I can't say I have," I answered, "but I'll look next time."

We were pretty well packed at the small table. Gyp had an instantaneous success with a smart young cavalry officer that sat on her right. He was the Governor of Algiers' A.D.C. He was evidently intrigued over her nationality, and at last he said, "It is not possible that Mademoiselle is English ? "

"No ; Georgian," she answered, "but I was brought up in Paris, and my mother was English."

"You've inherited many charming things, no doubt, from Madame *votre mère*," the young man said with a bow, "but no trace of English accent."

I listened and marvelled. It was always a revelation to me, this quick repartee in a foreign language, and awakened my envy and admiration every time.

As for Hancock, his French was frankly of the schoolboy order, but he was not self-conscious, and chatted away freely.

"I must go and fetch Titina," Gyp said,

rising. It was perfect weather and even the most pessimistic passenger could not be ill. We threaded our way along the narrow deck, which was so closely packed with the scarlet-painted chairs of the company as to be almost impassable.

" There she is," Gyp pointed at Titina, who was having a wild game with Greenwood. I was just going to utter a warning when the accident happened.

The dog rushed forward, and unable to stop herself, dashed her small body through the open bars of the bulwarks.

Greenwood stood petrified. We could see Titina swimming valiantly, but the distance between her and the ship was fast widening. Gyp turned like a flash and flew up the companion-way to the bridge. I could hear her voice raised in anger; evidently the captain was not entertaining the idea of stopping his ship for a mere dog. She came down the stairs even quicker than she went up. I saw a flash of silk-clad legs, as she flung off her skirt, and a glimpse of lace and ribbons. Then she was gone, and I saw her swimming towards Titina with long, easy strokes.

I was not alarmed; the sea was like a pond, and I could see that she was a good swimmer. I was more amused than

anything else : now the Captain would be obliged to stop. Already the order had been transmitted to the engine-room, and the ship was barely moving. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when I saw Greenwood fling his body through the air and land in the water with a heavy splash. He swam awkwardly, but more swiftly than it would have appeared, and he was rapidly gaining upon Gyp. She had almost reached the dog, and a few seconds later she caught the animal with one hand, keeping its head above water, for by now its long coat was making it difficult to keep afloat. By this time the deck was crowded with chattering, gesticulating people, most of the women on the verge of hysterics. "*Oh, le brave !*" I heard one girl say, in tones of admiration. Greenwood was swimming more slowly now, and as he reached Gyp I saw to my horror that he was nearly done. He gave a convulsive jerk and threw up his hands and disappeared. She let go of the dog and flung out her hand to him. As he came to the surface he grabbed it with the fierce clutch of the drowning, and I saw them both go down. They came up, Greenwood fighting madly, and Gyp trying to free herself. I never noticed Hancock jump in, but now I saw him approaching them with

long, powerful strokes. Just as they went down for the third time he dived after them and came to the surface with Gyp. Her head hung back and her long black hair washed round like seaweed. At this moment the boat came up and Gyp was dragged in, followed by Titina, who sprang to her side and began licking her face. Hancock, in the meantime, had pulled in Greenwood, and when they reached the ship Gyp was carried on board still unconscious. Greenwood was able to walk, and was madly cheered by the excited crowd, who persisted in regarding him as a hero, much to my annoyance. I followed Gyp to her cabin, where I found Hancock in possession. She was just regaining consciousness, and as she opened her eyes I heard a knock at the door. Frida Fergus stood outside.

" Can I be of any help ? " she asked softly.

This was a predicament. The last person I wanted inside the cabin was Frida, but it was manifestly impossible to say so. She was obviously of more use than I could hope to be.

" It's awfully good of you," I stammered, and then, to my utter relief, I heard Gyp's voice : " I wish you'd be an angel and ask for some coffee," Gyp said weakly.

Miss Fergus disappeared, somewhat reluctantly I thought, and Gyp laid her head rather suddenly on Allan's shoulder. "Don't leave me alone with her"—her voice was shaky—"I can't face her yet. Oh, Allan, I feel so sick, I've swallowed pints of water. Poor Greenwood, he meant so well, but he nearly throttled me with his drowning clutch."

I left the cabin softly. I felt Hancock was competent to deal with the situation by himself. A nature as self-reliant as was Gyp's would naturally dislike more people than was absolutely necessary seeing her in her present state of collapse. Besides, I had a few words to say to Greenwood. I found him the centre of an admiring crowd, who were offering him various strange-looking drinks. It was difficult to be severe with such a popular hero.

"Are you all right?" I asked coldly.

"Right as rain, sir. I'm afraid I was more 'indrance than 'elp, but I couldn't stand by and see a young lady like 'er going to 'er death."

I felt that I was getting the worst of this encounter.

"Miss Kiknadze swims very well," I said feebly, "and you don't seem to be—er—exactly an expert. Anyhow, you must know

that it is fatal to clutch hold of anyone who is trying to save you."

"But I was saving 'er, sir," Greenwood said with a bewildered expression.

"Yes, of course." I was getting rattled. "But later, when she was saving you; I mean to say—oh, hang it all. You meant well, I'm sure, but you damn nearly drowned the girl and yourself too."

I departed feeling that I had better have left well alone, and Greenwood returned to his admirers, to play the part of the popular hero. I met Hancock just outside Gyp's cabin.

"She's asleep now," he whispered. "I gave her some dope. She broke down completely after you left. I can tell you I was thankful; nothing soothes a woman like a good cry, and she'll be herself again by to-morrow. But I won't have that cursed 'Puss' near the cabin, with her everlasting fur tippet. She's been here twice already, nosing round with offers of help. We must take it in turns to sit in the cabin."

I nodded.

"That ass, Greenwood, nearly throttled her," he continued; "the man's a damned fool."

"The passengers don't think so," I said gloomily. "I wanted to give him five

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minutes straight talk, and failed badly. I believe he's conceived a romantic admiration for Gyp."

"Useful way of showing it." Hancock's tone was grim. He pushed open the cabin door. Gyp lay back upon her pillows, asleep. Her black hair, barely dry, was spread out round her. Her throat was bare, showing its fine moulding. She was dressed in a garment, composed chiefly of lace, which was strained across her shoulder in a strange manner.

"Did you put that on, Hancock?" I demanded.

"The only thing I could find," he said, in a half shamefaced way. "There's not much of it."

"Haven't you put it on back to front?" I asked. "It's making a red mark across her neck."

Allan groaned. "Why can't women wear pyjamas with sensible backs and fronts? It *does* look tight. It'll wake her up, I'm afraid." He gave it a gentle pull, and it ripped neatly the length of the lace.

Hancock looked at the garment in dismay and swore softly.

CHAPTER IX

THE ELECTRIC TORTURE

THE single electric light was shaded with a pink silk stocking, the only thing that was available at the moment. The boat rocked her way gently through the placid sea, under a night-blue sky that was a-glitter with stars.

I sat in Gyp's cabin and watched the rhythmic rise and fall of her breast under the soft lace of her night-gown. Hancock had thought it best for us to take turns in sitting up with her. She was still a little shaken as a result of the shock, and he thought it wiser for her not to be left alone in a locked cabin. And to sleep with the door unlocked would have been tempting Providence—in other words, one of our unknown Bolshevist friends.

Although for the last twenty-four hours there had been no manifestation of their activities, I was not optimistic enough to imagine that they had given up their hope

of success. I knew that they were only awaiting a favourable opportunity.

Gyp stirred in her sleep and moaned, and threw one arm restlessly above her head. I shaded the light more carefully and bent over her. Although from the moment of our first meeting I had felt her charm, it was not till to-day that I recognised how much she meant to me. I suppose I had led the ordinary life of the average man, neither better, nor worse, but now things seemed suddenly different. I wanted to take the girl away from the strange life, half romantic, half sordid, that she was leading. I wanted to see her in a setting more worthy of her, and, above all, I wanted her, desperately, as my companion and my wife. Life lived with her, and seen through her eyes, would take on a new richness and a new meaning.

Gyp moved again, then she opened her eyes and sat up. "Thank Heaven I feel better now"; her voice was strong and cheerful. "Allan's rather good at patching one up. I can't imagine why I went to pieces in that ridiculous way. However, I won't do it again."

"You went to pieces because your nerves are worn out after the strain of continual work. You don't realise yourself what you've been through."

“ What do you know about it ? ” Gyp’s tone was rebellious.

“ I’ve inferred a good deal,” I said, “ and Campbell told me a certain amount.”

“ My nerves’ll see me through this all right,” she promised. “ I’m not going to stand any nonsense from them. As a matter of fact, after this job is over, I’m going to take a long rest.”

“ I know you don’t approve of mixing business and pleasure, but I must talk to you seriously for a few minutes—please.” I threw all the appeal of which I was capable into my voice.

Into the grey eyes came that shadow I learned to know so well, and she leaned back against the pillows. Somehow, it was not as easy as I had imagined ; I drew a deep breath and plunged into speech.

“ Gyp,” I began, “ could you—would you—I mean to say I love you most frightfully, and will you marry me ? I’m not rich, but I’ve enough to keep the place going, and I think you’d learn to love the life. I’d do anything you wanted ; we could travel a bit, or stay at home, just as you liked. You’d appreciate my father and mother, and, of course, they’d love you.”

“ You’re Lord Lacey’s eldest son, aren’t you ? ” she interrupted.

I nodded.

"Don't you think they'd want to know a little about the past history of a girl who would, one day, be Lady Lacey? And if they were 'put wise' about it, do you think they would welcome me with open arms? And I should certainly tell them the whole truth."

"Don't, Gyp," I begged. "Nothing matters to me except the fact that you're you. I know what a hard time you've had——"

"Don't be sentimental"—her tone was crisp. "I've not had a hard time; anything I've done has been done of my own free will, and with my eyes open. Who was it who wrote: 'I should live the same life over if I had to live again, and the chances are, I'd go where most men go?' I'm not the emotional heroine—I don't repent in sack-cloth and ashes. My life is my own, and I can do what I like with it. But if I put myself in a false position, I should be injuring myself and everyone else. I'm not the wife for you, Deryk dear. Don't think anything more about it. Let's see this adventure through like good friends, and in the future, when you're married, I shall come to tea and play with the twins."

She looked so adorable lying curled up

amongst the pillows that I lost my head and, leaning forward, took her in my arms. She lay passive for a moment, then she threw her arms round my neck and gave me kiss for kiss with clinging lips.

"All this is very wrong," she said at last, "and an infringement of my strictest rule, but I can't help it." Then she pushed me away with a little unsteady laugh. "You'd better return to your cabin. I'm all right now, and perhaps it would be as well for me to preserve a shred of reputation on this ship."

I raised myself reluctantly and moved towards the door. As I put my hand on the bolt I stopped dead, unable to move. My feet were chained to the floor and my arms were pinioned to my side. A thousand tingling waves ran through my body, and the sweat broke out on my forehead in a million tiny beads. At the same moment I heard a small cry behind me, but I was unable to turn my head. Even my brain seemed affected, and I could only think in disjointed spasms. I knew that our enemies were at work again, and something that I had read about electric tortures practised by the Bolsheviks flitted through my mind.

I stood still—involuntarily—for about five minutes, till a violent spasm contracted my

body and I was turned round violently and found myself gazing at Gyp. The sight was almost too horrible to describe.

Her body was bent backwards in a complete arch, her head resting on the berth at one end, and her feet at the other. The whole of her body was in mid-air, and remained motionless except for an occasional twitch. As I looked she was shot forward with a violent jerk, and again she formed a semicircle, only this time the direction was reversed. Three times in quick succession was she jerked backwards and forwards, and I could hear her breath coming in short hard pants.

The air in the small cabin was stifling, and the atmosphere seemed a tangible weight. After the third spasm, Gyp's contortions ceased, and she remained in a rigid position, facing me, her eyes wide and staring, and a little blood oozing slowly from her nostrils. For a moment her spasms ceased, and in the silence I heard a faint note like the sound of a far-away flute. I dashed towards the door to unbolt it, but another violent shock rooted me to the spot. Continual shocks of varying strength kept me motionless and dumb, and still the faint sweet notes sounded thinly through the cabin, now high, now low.

Suddenly there came a higher and a sharper vibration than any which had preceded it, and Gyp gave a low scream. Again the note sounded, and the agony in her face was horrible to look on. She collapsed in a crumpled heap upon the berth, with the sweat running off her body in streams. Never before or since have I seen such a look of fear on any human being's face.

Outside the sea was rising and the wind was beginning to make its voice heard. There was that indefinable noise composed of rustling and creaking which pervades a ship when the elements are uneasy. Through it all I heard a human voice coming apparently from nowhere:

" Where is the formula of the essential factor? Where? " The last word was insistent.

There was no movement from the huddled figure on the berth. Then the same note sounded and Gyp gave a horrible gurgle like the half-choked death-rattle. She lifted her face, which was distorted with agony, and held out her hands pleadingly. I stood there, utterly helpless; I would have called for help, but every muscle was powerless.

Then far away I heard a bell. I felt the current switched off, and I managed to drag myself to the door and unbolt it. I almost

knocked down Hancock, who was coming along the alley-way.

"What's up?" he asked hurriedly. I pushed him into the cabin and shut the door. He bent down and looked closely at Gyp, who smiled back.

"Nice cheery sort of trip," she remarked.

"What happened?" Hancock turned to me impatiently.

"Electricity," Gyp answered, "the first part of the business, anyhow. I expect if we look we shall find some traces." She pointed to a dark mark on the carpet. "Look at that," she said. "When you touched the bolt of the door, you were naturally standing on that wet patch, so the contact was made at once." She slipped her hand under her pillow. It was damp and clammy. "They had only to wait for me to put my finger on the brass rail along the berth side," she explained, "and the same thing happened."

"How did they connect the current?" I asked.

"A transformer in the next cabin, I bet." Hancock was wildly excited. "That would bring the voltage of the ship's dynamo from 220 volts to 20,000." He ran his fingers under the edge of the carpet. "Here are the leads," he said, "passing under the

door. They connected with the high potential side of the transformer. My God! what a devilish plan."

He rushed out, and returned a moment later. "Cabin's empty and the leads disconnected, but they're there all right."

"What about those notes of music?" I asked.

Gyp shuddered. "You know how a glass will break when its exact note is reproduced? It is a case of the disruption of the electrons in the atom due to their sympathetic vibration. Well"—she paused—"that was their little game as far as I was concerned. They have an advanced knowledge of science. It was unspeakably awful; imagine knowing and feeling that your body was on the verge of violent disintegration."

Old Hancock was watching us both with an anxious expression, like a hen watches her foster ducklings.

"It's sickening for you, being in the dark about the whole business," she said penitently to him.

"No, it isn't," he replied contentedly. "I'm perfectly happy."

"Are you very sore?" I asked Gyp.

"Not as bad as you'd think." She smiled gallantly, but I knew that, judging by my own feelings, every nerve in her body must be aching.

"Are you going to do anything about this business?" I asked. I could not entirely rid myself of the feeling that the forces of law and order must be invoked.

"What's the use?" she said wearily. "Who's going to believe that sort of fairy-tale?—and besides, we want no outside interference. We must win or be beaten on our own. I *must* get some sleep," she added, and Allan settled himself with a determined air upon the other berth, only to be nearly bitten by "Titina," who had slept unmoved through all the excitement.

"Go to bed"; he pointed to the door, and I obeyed thankfully. I scrambled into my berth, my eyes heavy with sleep, when I thought I heard the sound of a woman's sobs. I sat up and listened, but the noise had died away.

I drifted into a dreamless sleep, and my last thought was of Gyp. Perhaps I was paying the penalty of light love, easily satisfied; what I now wanted was beyond my reach.

I slept, utterly fatigued, till Hancock shook me awake, and I opened my eyes to find the coast-line of Africa visible on the horizon.

CHAPTER X

FRIDA MAKES AN APPEAL

WE stood by the bulwarks as the *Maréchal Bougeaud* steamed slowly into harbour. It was past eight o'clock and the sky behind the hill, upon which Algiers is built, had turned pearly-opal, streaked with orange and jade. From where we stood the whole town seemed as if made of marble, and the minarets of the various mosques glittered in the fading light.

At close quarters Algiers is a most disappointing town; it is neither East nor West, and is full of the defects of both worlds. Trams clatter up and down the long hill which leads to Mustapha Supérieur, and in the big shop windows you can see the latest Paris fashions. But, after hours of search, you will fail to find an air-cushion, and you ask in vain for a modern novel. In the native town the narrow cobbled streets, so narrow that people can touch hands from the opposite roofs, are still as they were hundreds of years ago. They

preserve an atmosphere of gloom and impenetrable mystery, and strike chill after the sunlight outside. Veiled forms flit in and out of the narrow doorways, which look like blind eyes in the expressionless, sun-baked walls.

"A bit of a rabbit-warren," Gyp said cheerfully. "I wonder which is the best hotel and the least uncomfortable. Where are you two going?" she asked.

I gave a start. I had grown so accustomed to being with her that I had taken for granted we should all three go to the same hotel. Hancock grasped the situation quicker than I did.

"I'm going to the Regency"; then, turning to me, "Where are you going to shed the light of your presence, Warburton?"

"Oh, I think I'll come along with you," I replied, "the Regency has a home-like sound."

"You can fancy you are at the Regent Palace," Gyp mocked. "What a pair of cockneys you are. I hope we shall run across each other occasionally." This was so obviously meant for the gallery that even I was not taken in.

"Are you going to stay long in Algiers?" I asked, in what I flattered myself was a conversational tone of voice. My self-

possession was rudely shaken by a delicate and almost imperceptible wink from Gyp.

"It depends," she drawled, in what I used to call her embassy manner. It exactly resembled the languid air assumed by second and third secretaries who feel that in their hands rest the destinies of empires.

"In any case you'll have to put up with a visit or two from me," Hancock said. "I must make sure that you are none the worse for yesterday's ducking."

"Well, I'll come as chaperon," I announced.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Frida Fergus leaning against the bulwarks, and I wondered how much of the conversation she had heard. For once she was without the fur tippet, and she looked old and drawn. But her great dark eyes glowed with a fixed fanatical light, and I noticed again the firm, clean sweep of the line from jaw to chin. She was capable of any action that would lead her nearer to her goal. I looked away with a subtle feeling of discomfort, and as I did so I caught her eye, and I felt, as my nurse used to say, that a cow was walking over my grave.

At that moment the French officer who had sat next to Gyp at luncheon appeared, and kissed her hand with *empresment*.

"Will you be seeing His Excellency soon?" she asked.

"*Ce-soir même*," de Frissac replied.

"Then perhaps you would be very kind and give him this note. It's a letter of introduction."

De Frissac was visibly impressed. The Governor of Algiers is a person of some importance.

"It is from Colonel de Ricqles, your *chef de mission militaire* in London," she said, answering the unspoken question in his eyes.

"I have a carriage waiting for me," de Frissac said. "Will you permit me to drive you to your hotel—I should advise the Alexandra if you have not made yet your choice."

"Thanks awfully," said Gyp, with her most embassy-like air, and I tried not to laugh. It amused me exquisitely to see her in that mood, knowing, as I did, her absolute simplicity.

Hancock and I watched de Frissac and Gyp walk down the gangway, while the rest of us were herded behind a rope. A carriage was waiting, with a pair of magnificent Arabs in attendance, very gorgeous in flowing trousers and scarlet gold jackets. Gyp waved her hand as they drove off, and I turned to

Hancock. “ We mere mortals had better go and look for a hotel,” I suggested, and we began to force our way through the crowd.

The Regency proved to be the only possible hotel. Hancock and I had adjoining rooms, and we were soon engaged in the intricacies of a basin-bath. It needs practice and patience, but in the end it is even more thorough than a large tub ; you are so afraid of missing anything that you wash each portion of your anatomy at least twice.

Hancock came into my room clothed in a large bath-wrap and, stretching himself luxuriously in the sun, he lit a cigarette.

“ Gyp didn’t give you any instructions ? ” he asked.

I shook my head. “ I think we are expected to keep quiet, and when she wants us she’ll let us know.”

“ She is more run down than she realises,” Hancock said, “ but she’ll never give up until she’s finished this job—unless it finishes her first.” He sighed. “ I wish she wasn’t so damnably fascinating. Everything she does makes one more in love with her. I don’t suppose she’ll ever fall in love herself—she’s too busy.”

I laughed ; poor old Hancock looked so thoroughly miserable, but I was inclined to agree with him. Gyp would never fall in

love unless she meant to, and then! well, the man who was lucky enough to rouse that love would have a very fair foretaste of heaven, and I might add of hell.

"Frida Fergus is staying here," Allan said suddenly. "I suppose she couldn't get in anywhere else."

"She probably wants to keep an eye on us," I remarked. "She knows that Gyp can make circles round her every time, and that it's no use following her, but she thinks that we are easy game."

"Well," Hancock said placidly, "she is welcome to all I know, and that's a fat lot."

"The same here," I nodded, "but I think Gyp's right; the less we know, the less we can be trapped into giving things away."

"Yes, I can see that," Hancock agreed, then he got up and stretched himself. "I'm for bed," he yawned. "Good night. Call me if you are frightened of the dark." His humour was always a little heavy, but there never was a better fellow than old Allan, and he would have walked calmly over a field of red-hot ploughshares if friendship demanded it.

My bed seemed luxurious after the narrow berths I had been sleeping in for the last few weeks, and I arranged the light carefully and planned to have a peaceful hour's

reading. I had just begun the second chapter when I heard a sudden sound which made me sit up. There was a door at the head of my bed which presumably communicated with the next room. It was locked, I had seen to that, but the wood-work was thin, and I distinctly heard the noise of a woman sobbing. Vaguely I remembered having heard the same noise as I was falling asleep in the *Marechal Bougeaud*, and I sat up and listened carefully. There was a sort of subdued despair in the sound, as though the person had reached the limit of their endurance and could make no further effort at restraint. It was not nice hearing, and impulsively I slipped on my dressing-gown and went out into the passage. There was a light under the next door, and I tapped upon the panel gently. The sobbing stopped ; there was the sound of a footstep, and Frida Fergus opened the door. I never had a greater shock : up till now I had not been able to understand how any man could have found her attractive. But to-night, though her eyes were swollen from crying, she looked extraordinarily handsome. Her black hair hung in two heavy plaits over either shoulder, and instead of being dragged back it lay upon her forehead in a great rippling wave. Her face

was drawn and lined, it is true, but it could not alter the fascination of her beautiful, passionate mouth. She was dressed in a dressing-gown of dull crimson brocade, with what looked like a collar of dark sable fur.

For a moment I was so surprised that I could only stare, then I said: "I was afraid—I thought—you might be ill—I heard a noise——"

She smiled, and the smile lit up the whole of her face and made it look almost beautiful.

"Will you come in for a moment," she said, and feeling a little foolish I went in. She gave me a cigarette and lighted one herself. I could see her better now, and I wondered how it was that I had never realised what a wonderful figure she had. The brocade wrap clung to her closely, accentuating the lines. It was not a boyish figure like Gyp's, but that of a woman. Ordinarily I am no admirer of full curves, but their rounded slenderness and the line from hip to knee would have driven a painter into a state of frenzy.

"You heard me crying?" she asked simply.

I nodded.

"And you came to see if you could help me. That was kind," she said, "but then, I think you are kind."

I put my arm round her and led her gently towards the big arm-chair.

" Won't you tell me what is the matter ? " I suggested. " I heard you crying last night and again to-night—can't I help you ? "

" I am in great trouble," she said softly, " though no doubt it will seem a very trivial matter to you. But it means a great deal to me. I have lost my fur stole."

" Oh ! " I tried to appear sympathetic, but her remark was certainly in the nature of an anticlimax.

She looked at me gravely, then she laughed outright, showing her broad white teeth.

" It is funny, I know," she said. " Don't struggle to look solemn. Shall we talk openly, with our cards on the table ? "

I assented. I felt in the superior position of the man who knows more about the enemy than the enemy does about him. Not, to be strictly truthful, that I had any very strong feelings of enmity for Frida at the moment. No doubt I was very weak, but like the Ethiopian, I have always found it difficult to change my skin. I must confess that her next words came as a bombshell. " You know I am an agent for the Third International ? "

I began to stammer a reply.

" Yes, you know that," she smiled ; " I,

for my part, know that Gyp Kiknadze is working against me, and that you are in love with her. Forgive me if I appear impertinent. I do not wish to be. It is only natural that you should be attracted by her. She is beautiful and courageous—even more so than you perhaps realise. I have no grudge against her personally.

“She wants a certain paper we have in our possession, and we want the missing factor, without which the formula is useless. So far the result is in the lap of the gods. But we have the advantage because, having a basis on which to work, the successful result can only be a matter of time.”

She spoke with conviction and I was convinced that she believed what she said. Up till now she had been speaking with a cold detachment, but suddenly her manner changed.

“However,” and there was a quaver in her voice, “the matter is no longer in my hands. I have done my part, and I have handed the paper over to the next messenger. A promise was made to me, and that promise has been broken.”

I was listening intently, but the only thing that my brain grasped intelligently was the fact that Gyp had failed, and that the paper was gone.

"You can tell Gyp Kiknadze, if you must," she continued, in the same dull voice, "but nothing matters to me much now, for the work is over. I have finished with this life for ever. All I want is to try and forget—what might have been."

She stopped, fighting for self-control.

"You know, of course, that I was Vladimir Ivanovitch's mistress. If any woman ever loved a man faithfully, passionately, I was that woman. I cared nothing for the Cause—only for him. We were so happy together at first, before he grew tired of me. And in those early days, when we were so poor, he brought me that fur tie." She hid her face in her hands and great tears came dropping through her fingers. "I have nothing but that left to remind me of those days," she said, "and now that is gone."

I was silent. There seemed to be nothing to say. The wretched woman was utterly broken and no longer dangerous. She had done all the harm she could do. But why she imagined I could help her to find the fur tippet I was at a loss to understand.

"Of course, if I can do anything to help——" I began lamely.

She interrupted me quickly. "You could, you could. I left it in my cabin for one moment when I came to see if I could help

Miss Kiknadze, and when I returned it was gone. I saw your servant coming out of the state-room next mine——”

“Greenwood!” I ejaculated. “But what would he want with——” I was just going to say “that mangy bit of fur,” but checked myself in time.

“I don’t know,” she confessed, “but it was a good piece—once. Oh! do try and find out if he has it. Don’t ask him, but search his box.”

I forbore to tell her that one did not search English servants’ boxes, as if one were a member of the Russian Secret Police, but a sudden brilliant inspiration flashed through my brain. I saw myself the hero of the hour, a super Shylock Holmes; in fact, as I have once remarked already, I was a fatuous ass.

“If I can find the fur, will you tell me the name of the person to whom you passed the paper? After all,” I argued, “you say you have finished with the business; it can’t matter to you what happens.”

She appeared to hesitate for a moment, then she flung out her hands in a gesture of despair.

“I will,” her voice was very low. “I have finished with it all, and sometimes I think that I hate Ivanovitch. Find the fur and I

will tell you the name." She came closer to me and laid her hand on my arm. " Don't tell Gyp Kiknadze about the stole," she pleaded, and her beautiful eyes filled with tears. " The name is all she wants, and it is hard to think that another woman should know of my humiliation."

Frida must have been a great lover in her day, and I felt my pulses stir.

I left the room, very pleased with myself. I would tell Gyp nothing till I could give her the name of the man or woman who now had the paper in their keeping. Decidedly, I thought, I was an adept at this game.

I fell asleep and dreamt that I had found the tippet, and that it turned into a huge boa-constrictor and strangled me.

CHAPTER XI

WE GO SOUTH

HANCOCK walked into my room the next morning, carrying his coffee tray, which he balanced precariously on my bed. "I wish you could make the vestal virgin who waits on me realise that I want two eggs," he said sadly. "I've tried twice, but she doesn't seem to understand her own language."

"As spoken by you," I suggested unkindly, but he only grinned.

I rang the bell sleepily. I was still feeling a little dazed after last night's experience. Frida Fergus had shown herself in a very different light. It was almost impossible to realise that she was the same woman that I had seen every day on board ship. It was quite understandable that Ivanovitch had been attracted by her. Personally I thought that she was still worth his consideration.

I was undecided whether I should tell Gyp that the paper had already been passed on. I argued with myself that it was not

much use telling her until I knew the name of the person in whose possession it was at present.

" Do you suppose we shall see Gyp to-day ? " Hancock asked.

" In the words of a celebrated statesman, ' Wait and see, ' " I said lazily, " and in the meantime calm your fevered brain by gazing on the view behind you. Think what it's like in England now and be thankful."

" Very nice." Hancock cast an unappreciative glance out of the window and turned round again instantly. " When's that other egg coming ? "

" You ungrateful devil," I ejaculated, and certainly the view was something to wonder at. The window framed an exquisite bit of sea and sky, with the shiny leaves and sharp colour of an orange tree in the immediate foreground. The sea and the sky were the same shade of blue, and against that vivid background the burning orange stood out as though embossed.

" By Jove ! it's good to be away from the fogs and smuts," I said, drinking the delicious coffee that French people, alone, know how to make.

" Yes, but you needn't run away with the idea that you don't need an English breakfast," Hancock observed sententially ;

"more constitutions are ruined through not beginning the day on something solid than people realise."

"And your fee is how much?" I asked ironically. But he remained unmoved.

"Don't forget that I am P.M.O. to this unit," he said calmly.

"*Une dame qui vous demande au telephone,*" the little girl who waited on us announced.

"Gyp, I bet," Hancock stammered excitedly and I went downstairs.

"I am speaking from the Governor's house," Gyp said.

"I'm not surprised," I replied, "trust you for being comfortable and getting everything done for you."

A faint chuckle came from the other end.

"When you've quite finished insulting me," she continued, "you will be glad to know that you and Allan are invited to *déjeuner*. Now don't get swollen-headed."

"Thanking you again and again," I said, "and what is the correct method of procedure on these occasions? Do we kiss the Governor's big toe, and is there a Mrs. Governor—Governess, I should say?"

"Don't be profane," the voice at the other end laughed, "*déjeuner* at 12.30—unless—listen, Deryk—perhaps you and Allan

have made other plans. I don't want to be a nuisance.”

“ Don't be an idiot,” I said politely, “ don't you suppose we were both waiting with our tongues hanging out to hear from you ? ” she rang off.

“ We're invited to luncheon at the Governor's house ; Gyp's staying there,” I told Hancock, “ but she says that if you've anything better to do, don't bother.”

“ Anything better to do—I don't think—that girl's an angel,” Hancock said.

“ And that's where you slip up,” I retorted, “ she's a good deal too human to have much angel about her, thank goodness.”

The Governor's house was a square, white one, overlooking the sea and surrounded with palm trees. It had all the usual appurtenances of a government building, such as sentry boxes and sentries to fill them, and an armed escort of Arabs in front of the entrance.

We were taken to a large drawing-room, where we found the Governor, a large quantity of French officers, a sprinkling of wives, and Gyp. She had the knack of always being suitably dressed for the occasion, and to-day she looked particularly attractive.

She wore what I believe is called a white

stockinette dress, anyhow I know that it was soft and clinging and silky, and she had a bunch of red roses in her belt. She gave me two languid fingers with a slightly blasé air, and introduced me to the Governor, who assured me that he had often heard of me in connection with the Foreign Office. This amicable lie having been replied to in suitable terms, we went into luncheon, which consisted of innumerable courses, each one more delicious than the last.

I sat between two French ladies, one of whom was introduced to me as Madame la Générale. On finding that I had never risen above the rank of captain she considered me unworthy of further notice, and devoted herself with marked success to her food.

My left-hand neighbour was pretty, but not very communicative, and contented herself with asking innumerable questions, and saying, "*Ah! bon, bon,*" to all my replies. I envied Hancock, who announced quite firmly at the beginning of the meal, "*Je ne comprend pas français,*" and passed his time in gazing at Gyp, and devouring large quantities of food.

When lunch was over, every one made a hurried departure, and we rose to go, but the Governor would not hear of it.

"No, no," he said, "my officers have to

return to work, but I hope that you will stay and give me your opinion of my gardens. They are not as beautiful as your English gardens which I admire and know so well, but I have done my best with them. And Mademoiselle will be glad to have you share the ' five o'clock ' with her and me. That is also a habit that I learned in England. For myself, I must ask you to excuse me till then, as I have much work to do."

" Your latest conquest is a nice old gentleman," I said to Gyp, as we went out into the gardens.

" He was head of the French C.I.D. for five years," she explained; " that's how I know him."

" So you knew you were going to stay here ? " I asked, " and that wasn't a letter of introduction ? "

" Well, I guessed he'd invite me," she said casually. " Baron Corvisant is really an old friend."

I felt unreasonably annoyed ; it irritated me being kept in the dark about trifles, and I determined to tell her nothing about last night's episode. My conscience pricked me a little but I argued that there was nothing to tell. More especially as in the cold light of day I totally disbelieved Frida's story of having passed on the paper.

We wandered about the gardens, and I was conscious of a slight feeling of tension. Gyp was obviously in a bad temper, and Hancock kept looking at her in his silly dog way, till I could have kicked him.

"If you have finished admiring these hideous grounds we might go in," she said at last.

Her criticism was not just; the gardens were really rather fascinating: the paths were made of sand, hammered and rolled till they looked like grey velvet, and overhead, the palms and other trees met in great arches, so that even in the heat of the afternoon it was quite cool. There were no flowers, but every tree was of a different green, and an occasional hibiscus made a flaming touch of colour against the dark background. At the end of the paths, there were glimpses of the sea, which was dancing with light sparkles, rather as though a huge bottle of soda-water had been emptied on its surface.

"Let us go in by all means," I said politely, "and unless you have anything particular to say to me I think I shall go back to the hotel."

"I should," Gyp retorted, "perhaps you may find them there."

"Find what?" I asked unwisely.

"Your manners," she said tartly.

"Well, there's one thing," my voice was biting, "I know you haven't stolen them."

"Go and lie down, old lady," I heard Hancock say, as I walked away with what I flattered myself was an air of nonchalance.

Then I reflected, rather ruefully, that quarrelling like a schoolboy was not calculated to help matters.

I found the hotel wrapped in the stillness of the afternoon siesta, so I lay down on my bed, and fell asleep. I was awakened by Greenwood, who came in with a long face and the soft steps of one who brings unwelcome news.

I had put off speaking to him from hour to hour, partly because I was perfectly certain that Frida's suspicion was absolutely unfounded, partly because I didn't know how to broach the subject. However, I made up my mind that if I were going to say anything at all, now was the moment.

"I suppose you didn't see that brown fur Miss Fergus used to wear on board ship, lying anywhere, did you?" I began lamely.

"Brown fur, sir!" Greenwood echoed, in that particularly irritating voice, devoid of all sense, which servants use when they don't wish to understand.

"You know the one I mean," I said impatiently.

"Oh, the *brown fur*, sir!" Greenwood appeared to have a glimmering of what I meant, at last. "Has she lost it? Why, I saw 'er with it this morning."

"This morning!" It was my turn to look stupid.

"Yes, sir, just before she left."

So Frida had found the fur without my help, and had decamped. Naturally, she was not going to tell me the name of the agent to whom she had given the paper when I had not fulfilled my part of the bargain. Inwardly I was furious, but I had to hide my feelings.

"Oh, splendid," I said with forced heartiness.

Then Greenwood launched the thunderbolt.

"I am sorry to tell you, sir, that I must go home at once. I 'ave just visited the *Poste Restante* where I found a wire to say as Mrs. Greenwood is very bad."

I tried to appear sympathetic; as a matter of fact I only managed to look furious.

"Most unfortunate," I said coldly, "when do you intend to go?"

"The boat leaves to-morrow, early. Sorry to inconvenience you, sir, but you see 'ow it is?"

" I suppose so ! " I was in no mood to see anything of the sort. I gave him his wages. I'm not, as a rule, unsympathetic, but Greenwood got on my nerves badly. I felt almost certain that his wife's illness was a trumped-up excuse. No doubt he had taken a dislike to Algiers, or else he found me too exacting, so he had made up his mind to return to England at the first opportunity.

I wandered downstairs into the plush-covered, gloomy lounge. It was quite empty, except for the hotel dog, who suffered from eczema. His favourite trick was to come and rub himself against visitors' legs. I spent a solitary two hours wondering what Hancock was doing. It was past six o'clock when he arrived.

" His Excellency sat so long over his ' five o'clock ' that I couldn't get away," he explained.

" Has Gyp forgiven me ? " I asked.

" Oh, that's all right," Hancock said, " it's only that she's a bit nervy, there's nothing in it. Something was worrying her this afternoon. She didn't tell me what it was, but I made her lie down and take a dose of bromide."

" In fact, you behaved just like an old gamp."

"Exactly," Allan smiled ; he was the most even-tempered fellow I have ever known.

"You wouldn't be any the worse for some soothing syrup either," he continued. "However, we are moving on to-night."

"To-night ? " I exclaimed.

He nodded.

"You and I are to go together ; Gyp is going on her own ; in fact, we are not to see her till twelve o'clock to-morrow night. There's a man called Achami who will meet us at the station. He is to be our guide."

"It sounds a bit vague." I was still feeling irritable.

"It'll all be right on the night," Hancock quoted. "We need only take riding kit with us."

"That's a blessing," I grumbled, "as Greenwood is leaving for England to-morrow."

"No loss either," Hancock said, "that fellow's a rotter. Dopes."

"How do you know ? " I asked in surprise.

"It's easy enough to spot if you know anything about medicine," he said shortly.

The train for Biskra left at eight o'clock, so after a hurried dinner we transported ourselves and our kitbags to the station. We managed to get sleeping berths, but I sat until far into the night, staring out of the

window. The contrast between the super-civilisation of a *wagon-lit*, with its shaded lights and soft sheets, and the dark savagery outside is always fascinating.

We ran through Kabylia, with its mountain peaks standing outlined against the starry sky ; its deep valleys made denser and blacker by contrast with the moonlight which lay in silver pools upon the hillsides.

I stretched myself beneath the sheets with a sense of well-being. I never opened my eyes till we reached the junction where we changed for Biskra. All that day was a panorama of changing scenery. Sometimes it was rolling prairies of grass, with a solitary farm-house in the distance ; then again we plunged into mountain passes, where the sun coloured the bare rocks with splashes of carnation and tenderest mauve.

At last the palms of the oasis began to appear. About six o'clock we drew up at Biskra, very dusty and excessively thirsty.

A tall Arab stepped forward, offering us his hand, which we shook gravely. The Arabs have copied the French and shake hands upon every occasion. Achami was dressed in red, but the usual Arab head-dress of line, bound about with camel-hair cords, was replaced by a fez.

We followed him to a small hotel in the

main street. When you realise that the town of Biskra is one long street of cobble stones, this is not quite so imposing as it sounds. The hotel was a square building, with verandas on all four sides. The rooms looked on to the balconies, which were paved with small pieces of fancy tiles. The air was so dry that it made your skin tingle, and filled you with an extraordinary sense of exhilaration.

We washed off the dust of the journey, and we both fell asleep till Achami woke us with the news that it was time for dinner. "The gentlemen will do well," he said, "not to put on their riding clothes; let it appear as though they were staying the night."

I put on my travelling kit, and Allan produced a tropical suit of white drill, which he insisted upon embellishing with an appalling scarlet cummerbund; however, he scored an instant success with Madame la Patronne.

"*Monsieur a vraiment du chic!*" she exclaimed.

We smoked our cigars under the trees outside the hotel. At half-past ten all the lights were put out, and we went to our rooms—ostensibly to bed. Half an hour later, following Achami, we crept downstairs and out into the night.

"We have two miles to walk," he told us, "before we find the horses. It would have been unwise to have brought them nearer the town."

We plodded on. At the end of half an hour we found ourselves in a tiny oasis, where I could dimly see the outlines of the tethered animals.

"We are late," Achami said a little anxiously; "we must ride fast."

I could feel what an excellent mount mine was, though it was too dark to do more than see the tips of his fine, clean ears against the sky. We rode in silence for an hour, then Achami pulled up and whistled three times.

There was an answering whistle from a clump of palms on our right, and we rode towards it.

It was very dark in the shadow of the trees. For a moment I could see nothing, then I made out Gyp standing beside her pony, with another Arab in the background.

It was Gyp at her brightest and gayest, without a trace of fatigue. "You're most punctual," she said. "Did you have a good journey?"

"Splendid," I assured her. "How did you get here?"

"I thought it a mistake to be seen with any of you, so I came by air and arrived this evening. I've had a good sleep, and a wonderful supper of *couscous*." She led her pony into the light as she spoke. I saw she had on a very short skirt to her knees, a soft shirt, and brown buckskin boots. She swung herself into the saddle, and we started off at a steady canter.

"I couldn't let you know before," she said, "about this expedition to-night."

"Look here, Gyp," I interrupted, "I'm most awfully ashamed of myself over the way I behaved yesterday."

"Don't be an idiot," she laughed; "if anybody was to blame it was I. Besides, I hope we know each other well enough not to bother about things like that. I found out a good deal," she continued, "since yesterday. Frida is meeting Ivanovitch to-night, and if, as I think, she's going to pass the paper on to him, we're all right. It only remains to have him arrested."

I said nothing. So far I had only succeeded in making a fool of myself when I interfered, so I held my tongue.

"They are meeting in a small oasis," Gyp went on; "it's going to be a ticklish job getting there, without running into them. However, we ought to arrive an hour before

they do. She's coming from a village in the north."

" What about the horses ? " I asked.

" Achami is going to take them away directly we arrive. He will wait about a mile away. Otherwise they will give the show away at once. You have got your revolver, of course ? "

I nodded.

" Not that it would really help us," Gyp said, " because Ivanovitch is well guarded. Still, if we are to die, we might as well have a run for our money."

She spoke quite calmly. I agreed. Little shivers of goose flesh ran down my spine.

Presently we saw the dark clump of the oasis against the skyline. As soon as we reached the spot, Achami collected the horses and took them away.

" Are we going to hide behind the tree trunks ? " I asked.

Gyp giggled helplessly.

" A game of ' I spy,' " she said, " and our three mutilated bodies as the result ! No, my dear, I have a slightly more scientific plan."

" I know," Allan said brilliantly ; " we're going to hide among the palm leaves."

" O brilliant child ! " Gyp patted him on the back. " I must hide Deryk first, as

I have no belief in his power of concealment. Here," she said, tossing me a pair of padded gloves and some knee-pads, "put them on; you'll need them."

I managed to swarm up the trunk without much difficulty, but once amongst the trees it was not so pleasant. I cut myself pretty freely, but at last I managed to get hidden to Gyp's satisfaction. "Catch," she said, throwing me a length of rope; "you'll want that for Allan. Throw me down the pads."

She went up the trunk off Allan's shoulders like a wild cat. She was as supple as a monkey. A moment later she was completely hidden. Hancock was not long in joining me, then Gyp said, "Don't speak or move again."

There was utter silence, broken only by the sound of a thin little wind which played amongst the trees.

Hours or minutes might have passed before I heard a noise, and then a voice said in French, "*Enfin, nous voila.*" With infinite precaution I managed to catch a glimpse of five or six Arabs, standing beside their horses. The sound of galloping hoofs was borne clearly to our ears on the desert wind.

Frida Fergus cantered up and jumped lightly to the ground.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF FRIDA

SHE was dressed like Gyp, in a rough brown tweed and a soft hat. The kit suited her, and her figure looked its best in the simple lines. There was a movement amongst the Arabs when she appeared. One of them collected the horses and led them into the middle of the oasis. They sat down in a semicircle, and the tallest one spoke. The conversation was in French.

“Have you done the work that was allotted to you?”

Frida turned towards the speaker, and her voice shook.

“I was successful till yesterday, Vladimir Ivanovitch, and then I had the incredible misfortune to lose the paper.”

The tall Arab in the middle of the group sprang to his feet and caught her by the wrist.

“Lost it?” he said very softly, but the tone of his voice sent shudders down my

back ; " and you come here to tell me this ? "

" Would you rather that I had not come to tell you ? " she asked calmly. Even at that moment I could not help admiring her courage.

" Do you expect to be allowed to return alive ? "

" I expect nothing from you," she said bitterly.

Ivanovitch dragged her closer, and peered into her face, but she shook herself free.

" I did the best I could "—her voice was sullen—" my luck was out."

" Was the paper stolen ? " Ivanovitch snarled.

I could see his fingers working as though he could hardly keep his hands off her.

" I know nothing. The paper was sewn in the lining of my fur tippet, which I wore night and day. I left it for one moment on the berth in my cabin. When I returned it had gone."

" Are you mad, you fool ? " Ivanovitch gave her a furious glance. " Who but a half-wit would carry a secret document in a place like that ? "

" You are the fool," she answered sharply. " Would you keep it in a locked steel box for all the world to wonder at ? "

" What then ? " he asked.

" Gyp Kiknadze jumped overboard to save her dog. When they brought her to her cabin I hung round under the pretence of helping. I thought I might find the formula for the missing factor. She is no fool, either. I know she carries it in some ordinary, simple place. But those two men never leave her. They hang round like ——"

Frida's language became simply Biblical.

" Ah, she's young and beautiful," Ivanovitch said deliberately. " Your day is past. No man will hang round you again."

" It was when I returned to my cabin that I found the fur had gone."

Ivanovitch's hand shot out, and a moment later Frida was lying half stunned upon the sand.

" You dare to face me with this tale ? " he choked. " The time is passing ; the missing factor is not found ; now the paper itself has gone."

He kicked her savagely with his riding-boot, and it was with difficulty that I prevented myself scrambling down from the tree and knocking him flat. But I restrained the impulse and choked back my feelings.

She raised herself upon her elbow and dragged herself painfully towards him.

" Vladimir," she moaned, " pity me a little.

I know I have failed, but I will make amends. Forgive me this once, and for God's sake remember how I love you. You cared for me once. Think of the boy."

"Praise Heaven the brat died," Vladimir said piously; "he might have resembled you."

She gripped him round the ankle with a sort of desperation, but he wrenched himself free and drove his boot into her face.

The blood poured out of her mouth, but she continued to crawl after him like a wounded dog.

I felt sick; there was nothing to be done except to sit quiet.

"Vladimir," she said monotonously. Suddenly he turned round and looked at her.

"Get up and listen," he said roughly.

She dragged herself to her feet, and stood swaying uncertainly, the blood flowing from her mouth making a monotonous dripping sound upon the sand.

"Are you sure that Gyp Kiknadze carries the formula of the missing factor?"

"Almost certain," she said painfully. She could hardly articulate.

"Then listen: if you can manage to kill her I will take you back. Perhaps you will arrive at getting another brat to keep you quiet. Anyhow, if you can kill her you need work no more."

Frida raised her eyes to his face with the wild light of hope in them.

"Do you mean that?" she asked.

"I swear it before God," he said.

She staggered towards him, her hands outstretched, like someone groping in the dark.

"Vladimir," she murmured, "I will work for you; I will live for you; I will grow young and beautiful again. Perhaps even you will love me. . . ."

Ivanovitch laughed loudly as though he were really amused.

"Do you think I am a worker of miracles?" he asked. "The trees have fresh leaves every spring; but the dead tree trunk has no sap with which to nourish them. Your spring and your summer are far behind you—still, even an old dog can bark," he added philosophically, as he turned on his heel and beckoned for the horses.

"You have a week," he said to Frida. "If after that time Gyp Kiknadze is still alive . . ." he shrugged his shoulders.

Frida dragged herself into the saddle, and the whole party left.

We all remained motionless till the riders had disappeared into the haze on the horizon, where the dawn was flooding the desert with light. Gyp dropped on to the sand with a sigh of relief.

"I feel as if I could stretch for ever," she said, suiting the action to the words. "Are you as cramped as I am."

"I am nothing but one huge ache." Hancock threw himself down beside her. There was silence for a few moments, broken only by the sound of our shameless yawns. Then Gyp sat up.

"Frida is no fool, after all," she said bitterly. "As for me, I have been about two dozen different sorts."

"Damnation!—fancy the paper being in the fur tippet after all! We are nicely in the soup! Goodness only knows who's got it."

She frowned, and chewed the back of her glove.

"I shall have to think this out." She rose slowly to her feet. "In the meantime nothing matters except a hot bath, coffee and a long sleep. There's Achami with the horses."

We could just see the Arab in the distance, and we moved out to meet him.

"What do you think of Ivanovitch as a lover?" Gyp asked calmly.

"I wanted to get down and thrash him," I answered.

"Don't be a fool," Gyp retorted. "The way Frida behaves makes me ashamed of my sex."

" I believe she worships him," I said doubtfully.

" There's no fool like a woman who's passed the age when she can attract men." Her voice was scathing. " You heard what she said about Allan, you and me? That means another little score to settle. As for killing *me*, if that's the only hope she has of becoming Vladimir's mistress again, she had better make up her mind to a lonely old age."

Her eyes were blazing and her mouth was set in a thin line. This was not the Gyp I knew, but I had just enough sense to hold my tongue.

" I'll race you a mile," she said, her mood suddenly changing.

She swung herself on to her horse ; she rode as well as a man, with a supple, easy seat. I shall never forget that mad gallop. The sun was climbing above the edge of the horizon ; the shadows lay a vivid blue against the glistening yellow of the sand. Above our heads the sky seemed immensely distant. It was like a page out of an illuminated missal in blue and gold. We galloped on. Gyp pulled up as suddenly as she had started.

" What a mess life is ! " she said sombrely. " Now it's up to me to make things a bit worse." She rode on in silence for a few

moments. "All the same"—her tone held a certain cheerfulness—"The game's one up to Frida and one to play. *Qui vivra—verra.*"

We had coffee on the veranda of the hotel. Gyp was as gay and amusing as I had ever seen her. She was essentially a creature of moods.

When she was feeling at her best, nothing could depress her, but the depths of her depression were unfathomable. She got up at last and stretched herself luxuriously. "I will see you both later," she promised, "after a bath and bed."

I did not wake up till four o'clock, when I wandered out into the Square, where the hot sunlight beat down upon the cobble-stones. Biskra is a mixture of civilisation and semi-savagery. One feels that the little oasis is there on sufferance. One day the desert will swallow it up as though it had never been. The Casino and the big, pretentious hotel which face it are utterly out of keeping with their surroundings and intensify the feeling of its utter desolation.

I went back to the hotel about five o'clock, where I found Allan in the hall. "Gyp's just sent a message by Achami," he told me. "She's making tea in her room."

We went upstairs together. She had one of the back rooms opening on to the veranda

which, in turn, looked upon the courtyard. Great masses of bougainvillia climbed the balustrade, flowing in waves of purple up to her very door. The first sight of Gyp's room made me gasp.

Although she had occupied it for barely six hours, it radiated her personality in an amazing degree. I suppose it was the effect of a few cushions and a crimson piece of brocade which was flung upon the bed, but the result was to change the bare, white-washed bedroom into a place glowing with light and colour. She had put on the same gown which she had worn the first evening on the *Nankin* ; its crimson and silver tones reminded me of that stormy night and our conversation.

She had made tea on a Tommy's Cooker. I thought longingly for a moment of an English fireside and toasting muffins.

" I felt as though nothing but tea would wake me up." She handed me a cup as she spoke. " I want to talk business. One of you will have to keep watch on the veranda. This is too convenient a place for eaves-dropping."

We drank our tea nearly in silence. I think we were all a little tired, and the atmosphere was very oppressive. The sun had disappeared ; the sky was grey and yet

radiated heat ; I wanted to sit with my eyes shut ; the wind was blowing in fitful bursts, raising great clouds of sand and grit.

" I'll keep watch." Allan disappeared on to the veranda, shutting the door behind him.

The faint light which filtered through the *persiennes* barely enabled us to see each other's faces. Gyp lit a small candle, which only seemed to make the darkness more tangible. The wind rattled the shutters ; fine particles of sand filtered through the cracks and gritted against our teeth.

" You heard the orders which Ivanovitch gave Frida ? " Gyp asked.

I nodded.

" Well, obviously I have no wish for her to succeed. If she can arrange ' to do me in,' no sentiment of pity or any weak emotion of that description is going to stop her."

" What are you going to do ? "

" Get rid of her before she has time to strike."

" Not kill her ? " I said abruptly.

" Certainly ! "

" But—but it's horrible," I stammered.

" Well, isn't it less horrible than her killing me ? " Gyp asked. " I shan't do it with my own hands, if that's any comfort to you."

" I see she must be stopped," I agreed.

" It was only for a moment that it gave me rather a shock."

" I know how you feel," she said. " I don't like it any better than you do ; but one of us has got to go under "—her mouth tightened—" it's not going to be me."

I tried to look at the situation from a rational point of view. As she said, it was one or the other, and Heaven forbid that it should be Gyp. I wouldn't have minded a twopenny damn if it had been a man. In fact, I would have volunteered for the job had it been Ivanovitch. But it was the memory of Frida, with her bleeding mouth, begging for another chance of happiness that upset me.

" Have you got any plan ? " I asked at last.

" A pretty good one, I think. They can do their own dirty work."

" Their own ? " I echoed vaguely, " how ? "

She drew her chair closer.

" Frida is staying at a small village about fifteen miles from here. I expect she is also busy making plans. Ivanovitch is wandering about with a couple of sheiks, trying to stir up sedition amongst the tribes. I sent the Governor of Algiers a note on the subject to-day."

" Yes ? " I prompted.

"I am going to send Frida a note," she said slowly, "enclosing one hundred pounds 'in payment for information received,' promising another hundred as soon as I receive any further news of importance."

"I don't quite see——"

"There are ways and means of ensuring that the letter will fall into Ivanovitch's hands ; when he reads it, I think he will do the rest."

There was not a sound in the room. The wind had fallen and the atmosphere was stifling. I put up my hand ; my forehead was wet with perspiration ; the candle burned with a steady blue flame, throwing long shadows upon the white walls.

"Well ? " Gyp asked.

"It's a wonderful plan," I said, pulling myself together. "Thank God I need have nothing to do with it."

Gyp laughed—a little hard laugh.

"No, you can keep your conscience clear," she said shortly, "this is my job."

I joined Hancock on the veranda and we went down to my room ; I told him the plan.

"Pretty good," he said enthusiastically.

"My word, Gyp has got a brain ! "

I looked at him in silence. I knew I was wrong, but the whole idea sickened me.

I passed the next day in exploring Biskra ;

I even hired a horse and went out to visit the sand-dunes, but I was conscious of a slight feeling of strain between myself and Gyp. I couldn't help it. I knew that swift measures were the only things which could avail anything, but I could not forget Frida's hopeless eyes as she spoke of Ivanovitch.

Then the blow fell. *Mumai*

It was two days later; Hancock and I were going back to Algiers that evening; Gyp had said nothing about her plans, but I supposed that she was going to fly.

I was on my way to visit an oasis about twenty miles distant, where they had recently found traces of some Roman remains. The military authorities had insisted upon my taking a small escort; the men rode in front while Achami rode with me. The heat was intense and I felt sleepy. Achami ordered the troopers to ride on and prepare a resting place for luncheon. They galloped off in the direction of a clump of palm trees; one of them suddenly wheeled his horse and came back at a furious pace; he said something to Achami in Arabic.

"Monsieur must come at once," the latter translated.

A golden haze lay like an impalpable veil over the quivering horizon. The heat, rising from the sand, struck one in the face like a blow.

I dismounted at the edge of the palm trees and entered the blessed shade with a gasp of relief ; then I started back with an exclamation of horror.

There, bound to a tree-trunk, stood the naked body of Frida Fergus !

Her long black hair had been wound round and round her throat till it had strangled her. Her eyes were open, starting from her head. Her tongue, which had been torn out by the roots, lay on the sand, swollen and blackened in the withering heat. One hand had been severed at the wrist, and hung round her neck ; in the other was tightly clasped a torn letter. I turned away. I would willingly have taken my horse and galloped off far away from the awful sight ; but common decency prevented me.

I ordered the escort to dig a grave.

I said such portions of the Burial Service over the mangled remains of the wretched Frida as I could remember ; then I rode back to Biskra.

I went straight upstairs to Gyp's room and told her what I had seen.

" So," she said calmly. She picked up a cigarette ; then her studied calm broke down. She hid her face in her hands.

" Thank God," she moaned, " it's over and she can't suffer any more. I felt as though

these last hours would never end. You thought I didn't care." She looked me full in the face.

" I—I——" I stammered helplessly.

" It was no use shirking a thing that had to be done," she said, wiping her eyes. " I learnt the futility of that long ago, but neither you nor anyone else know what I have felt like during this last day." She shuddered, burying her face in Titina's fluffy coat, who promptly ran a hot red tongue over her cheek.

" We will go and get something to eat. You look in need of a brush," she added. " Greenwood will have a fit when he sees you."

" Greenwood is in France by now," I said.

" In France ! "

" He told me his wife was ill and that he must go back to her—he left the night we started to come here."

" So that's where the paper has gone ! " Gyp exclaimed, starting to her feet. " Greenwood stole it from Frida."

" Then she was right ! " I shouted. " But why did he want it ? Did he know anything about it ? "

" Greenwood is also a Bolshevik agent ; he is working for the same cause as Frida was, but under a different Chief. Their

Secret Service is so divided that they would do one another down even at the risk of spoiling a particularly brilliant coup. Greenwood is working for a man called Hoffmann—a Russian from the Baltic Provinces; he hates Ivanovitch and would do anything 'to put it across him' as the Americans say."

"Why did you never tell me Greenwood was a spy?" I asked.

Gyp shrugged her shoulders. "I wasn't perfectly sure myself until the day when he jumped after me into the sea. He could swim perfectly; he pretended to sink, so as to get a chance of dragging me down. I thought he might spoil Frida's *affaire*. It all comes of trying to be too clever."

She walked restlessly up and down the room.

"Ivanovitch and Hoffmann are two of the head agents, but they in their turn report to a man called Dansaz. He is the head of the whole show, and is always alluded to as 'D.' The majority of people don't know his real name. Ivanovitch and Hoffmann hate each other like poison. I think Greenwood found out where Frida kept the paper and stole it, hoping that he might have the luck to get hold of the missing factor as well, and so steal a march on Ivanovitch. Anyhow, we've got to get back that paper within

a week ; it's absolutely imperative to find Greenwood."

"How ? " I asked.

"We must separate. Heaven help us if we don't locate him."

"Where shall we meet, and when ? " I asked.

She thought for a moment.

"Under the Arcade in Regent Street—opposite Piccadilly Circus—at 10 p.m., in three weeks from now."

"Here's Allan," I said, as Hancock came in.

We told him the news and our plans for the future.

"It's damnable that you should go off by yourself." He looked longingly at Gyp.

"Not the first time," she laughed ; then she relented. "Will you come with me and do watch-dog ? " she asked him.

"Thank Heaven ! " he said simply.

The stars were coming out one by one in a blue velvet sky, as we went our separate ways. I hated leaving Gyp, but I enjoyed the idea of independent action.

CHAPTER XIII

I MEET OLGA—

IT was a typical November morning in London. The fog hung in heavy folds over the whole town, dark enough to make electric light necessary, but not sufficiently dense for a really romantic atmosphere.

There is a certain sense of adventure about a real black fog. Everything is so altered it might be another plane of existence ; the mouthfuls of cold acrid essence stimulate the senses like a first breath of ozone. After all, adventure is the salt of life. Were it not for the spirit of our marauding ancestors, which still has power at times to move us, existence would be even more drab than it is at present. Happily, the love of adventure dies hard ; even in middle age we still possess the precious spark of imagination which lit the fire of our youthful ambitions. We still "pretend," although the magic wand which transformed the domestic cow into a wild buffalo and the footman into an Indian brave is lost, at heart we are ready for

an adventure. Anything which lifts us out of the rut of our daily life is welcomed.

This fog was merely annoying ; it covered everything with greasy dirt ; my eyes smarted and I sneezed violently ; yet it was not thick enough to cover up realities or change them into delicious possibilities.

I felt thoroughly depressed ; I had had a most uncomfortable return journey, and was now faced with what seemed to me an insoluble problem. If the problem remained unsolved, not only had Gyp failed, but a most dangerous secret was in an enemy power's possession.

I missed Allan and Gyp horribly. I had grown to regard them as part of my daily life, so quickly do we adapt ourselves to a new environment. The only bright spot was the fact that I had returned to find Kendrick restored to his normal health. Gyp had impressed on me the importance of keeping the object of my search a profound secret, so I had merely mentioned Greenwood's name casually to Kendrick. I explained that he had had to leave me owing to his wife's illness.

" I found travelling so uncomfortable at the moment that I came back," I said. " I shall do nothing for a bit. Perhaps in a couple of months I shall be fit enough to go back to the Foreign Office."

"You look no better for your voyage, sir, that I will say," Kendrick remarked cheerfully. Like most good servants, he was of a lugubrious turn of mind. He liked nothing better than to be the bearer of bad tidings. "You look worse, sir, than when you left."

"Well, look at this damnable weather," I said irritably. "By the way, I don't suppose you know where Greenwood lives? I owe him some money."

"He's got rooms in Chester Mews, sir. Shall I send him a message to come round?"

"No, I want a walk. I can look in there some time to-day."

Naturally I did not expect to find Greenwood. His passport had been properly viséd at Algiers by the British Consul, there being no apparent reason, of course, against his doing so. After that he had disappeared till he landed at Folkestone, where all his papers were found to be in order.

He had not even been signalled as a "suspect." The authorities had an ingenious way of arranging the signature of the examining officer over the official seal. If the signature came above the seal, the owner of the passport was slightly "suspect," if it came in the middle, he was innocuous; but if it came below, he was looked upon as a dangerous individual.

Not having been able to warn the British Consul in Algiers, he had viséd the passport in the ordinary way. I dared do nothing once I had arrived in England, as we were anxious not to have any police interference. The more secret we kept our suspicions, the less likely was it that our quarry would take flight.

The fog had lifted a little as I walked down Piccadilly, but at Hyde Park Corner it was denser than ever. I could not cross the street ; I made the attempt once and ran straight into the side of a bus, which luckily for me, was stationary ; I retraced my steps cautiously and stood hugging the railings, hoping that it might soon clear.

It was extraordinarily uncanny, hearing the sound of voices, muted by the fog into deep whispers. I felt human beings brush against me without being able to distinguish their features. I felt as isolated as though I were on a desert island, although hundreds of people stood within a few feet of me.

I remained in the same place for over ten minutes without the slightest sign of the atmosphere clearing. I was thinking of making another effort to cross the street, when I was startled by the sound of a whisper at my elbow. I could have sworn that I had heard my own name. I turned round

sharply ; there was nothing to be seen except the swirling clouds of acrid vapour ; I must have made a mistake I thought. I was moving forward to find the edge of the pavement when once again I heard a whisper.

“ There he is,” a voice said softly. As I turned round, my right hand was suddenly seized and I felt a a burning pain below the knuckles. I dashed through the fog in the direction from whence the whisper had come. I found nobody and only succeeded in colliding with the iron railings and barking my shins.

I looked at my hand. It was throbbing and smarting ; upon the back was branded a large “ 3.” I looked at it in amazement, forgetting the pain in sheer surprise. Who on earth had done this ? What was their object ? The fog showed no sign of clearing, and at last, after various futile efforts, I reached Chester Street.

It was much lighter here, and I found the Mews with no difficulty.

“ Greenwood ? ” a stableman said, in answer to my question, “ he’s not here at present—leastways, he wasn’t ; his wife’s here though ; she lives up there.” He pointed out a small balcony a few doors off, and I climbed the stairs. Mrs. Greenwood opened the door. She was quite different

from what I had expected. Fair and small, with a fresh country complexion, she looked totally unlike the wife of a Bolshevik spy.

" I came to pay Greenwood some money I owed him ; is he in ? " She dropped me a curtsy, which so astonished me that I nearly fell backwards.

" He's gone up to Scotland with a gentleman who wanted a valet," she told me.

" Then you weren't ill for long ? " I said, hoping to catch Greenwood out.

" No, sir ; it was a nasty sharp attack of 'flu, and nothing would do mother but she must telegraph for Jack. I told her it was a shame, depriving you of a valet and all, but she was nervous on account of the deaths that have been lately."

" Can you give me his address ? "

She went into a back room and came back with an address scribbled on a bit of paper.

" It's right up north, sir ; a long journey,"

" I thought of sending him the money." I said deliberately, " but I may as well leave that with you."

She curtsied again as she took the money, but at the sight of my burnt hand she uttered an exclamation.

" Whatever have you done to your hand ? " she said in distress.

I pulled on my glove hastily.

"I burnt it with a spirit-lamp this morning."

It was the most obvious lie I could think of on the spur of the moment.

I determined to start for Scotland that evening. It seemed rather a forlorn hope, but my experience has been that when there is only one course open—however desperate it may be—it is best to take it without hesitating.

Gyp was never out of my thoughts for a moment. The slightest thing served to remind me of her and to bring a mental vision of her warm, vivid beauty before my eyes. She had never failed in any job that she had undertaken, until now. It should not be my fault if she did not succeed this time. She was not in love with me. I had more than a suspicion that Allan occupied a very warm corner in her heart. But she was adamant in her decision against mixing business and pleasure. And I could only wait and hope for the best.

Euston was looking as grey and grimy as possible. There was a bitter wind driving along the platform. I thought with a shiver of my warm comfortable room; I had not dared bring Kendricks—who was more than a little annoyed at being left behind.

The train was very empty. There seemed

to be only one other passenger in the sleeping-car—a woman. She was so shrouded in veils and furs that I could see nothing of her. When we had finally started she shed some of her wrappings, and I began to take more interest in her. She was exquisitely dressed in a very French-looking tailor-made coat and skirt, with just a hint of reddish hair showing beneath her blue velvet cap.

I ran into her in the corridor where she was standing, cigarette in hand, hunting vainly in the depths of her bag for a match. I struck a light for her and she smiled gratefully.

" Thank you so much "—her tone was very friendly—" I thought I'd put a box in my bag, but it seems to have disappeared."

" Are you going far ? " I asked. As a rule I hate my fellow-passengers, but she was something quite out of the ordinary.

" Edinburgh—and you ? "

" A good deal farther," I said guardedly. I had no intention of disclosing my destination.

After a few minutes' conversation I suggested that my carriage would be warmer than the 'extremely draughty corridor. We smoked and talked for over an hour ; then she insisted upon making some chocolate on a Tommy's Cooker which she had brought with her.

“ I must go to bed now,” she said at last—
“ br-rr-r—isn’t it cold ? ”

I was indulging in a last cigarette before turning in myself, when I heard her voice and saw her peeping through the door of her “ sleeper.”

“ I wonder if you could possibly lend me a rug ? I don’t want to be a nuisance ; only you said you had plenty, and—and I *am* so cold.”

I picked up a big black kaross and took it in to her carriage.

She reminded me of the supplement in a Christmas Number ; her red hair came below her waist. Now that her hat was off I could see that her eyes were green, with thick, black lashes. I suppose it was design, not chance, that her nightgown was made of something black and filmy with orange shoulder-straps which ought to have clashed with the colour of her hair, and for some reason didn’t.

I wrapped the soft rug warmly round her. She gave a little sigh of satisfaction and sank back on her pillow. The dull white of her shoulders gleamed against the soft black fur. It is not often, I reflected, that the gods are so kindly disposed.

I turned out the light ; the moonlight streamed through the windows, and outside

the fields lay deep in snow, the bare black tree-branches encrusted in white.

The train rushed through the winter night, but for me the fragrance of spring bloomed inside the dark carriage. My senses were drugged by the heavy scent of sweet flowers ; I grew blissfully weary, and was only conscious of the warm clasp of soft arms and the touch of red lips. Then swirling waves of darkness began to break across my brain ; I struggled helplessly to wake up but they increased in power, and at last I gave up the contest. I let myself glide into a dark, formless void where I found peace. Before I became quite unconscious I heard a phantom voice which kept muttering, " Number three, number three," then a huge " 3 " all purple and blood-red danced in front of my eyes.

I tried to grasp it but it eluded me ; I begged it to go away, but it stayed and gibbered at me. Slowly I opened my eyes ; the " 3 " had disappeared, but I felt convinced it was somewhere near. I raised myself, but the pain in my head made me fall back gasping. I moved my eyes cautiously from side to side ; a cold winter dawn was creeping in through the unshuttered windows and the air was heavy with the smell of drugs. I was aching with cold, and my head was buzzing like the

inside of a gramophone. The carriage was quite empty.

Very slowly I pulled myself to a sitting position ; there was not a sign of my companion of the night before. She had vanished, utterly and completely. I staggered to the door and opened it ; a flood of fresh air from the passage acted on me like a tonic ; I realised what had happened, at least I could think of no other reasonable explanation. The delightful stranger was obviously one of Greenwood's co-agents ; she must have thought me remarkably easy prey, I reflected ! What they hoped to find on me, I could not guess. But they were taking no chances.

The mystery of the figure " 3 " was deeper than ever. I racked my brain to think of an explanation and could find none. The fact remained—only too well proved by my throbbing head, that for some reason I had been drugged and searched—and if the humiliating truth be confessed, completely taken in by a pair of bright eyes.

I sluiced my face with icy water. By the time I had reached Ardgowan Station I was able to totter on to the platform and watch the retreating train wind its way amongst the snowy hills till it was lost to view.

" Wull you be for the Castle ? " the station-

master asked hopefully as I gave up my ticket.

I shook my head.

" For the meenister's, then ? "

On realising that I was a visitor neither for the Castle nor for the Manse, he seemed utterly at a loss. I realised that I must account for myself in some way. One does not arrive at eight o'clock on a cold morning in January at a small Highland station without some definite ideas on the subject of board and lodging.

" I am going to the inn," I said at random. " The doctor has ordered me change of air."

" Ou aye, I thocht maybe ye were for them new buddies—they as has ta'en Ardgowan Lodge."

" Oh, who are they ? " I asked conversationally.

This sounded interesting.

" A dinna richtly ken. They're awful rich ; they keep fower lassies to do the dusting and twa men to wait at the table. An' yin of the lassies tellt me they have an egg to their tea every afternoon."

" Oh," I said vaguely. The fact that the " lassies " had an egg for tea every evening failed to produce the thrill that was evidently expected.

"Don't you know the name of the people who have taken the Lodge?" I asked.

"Their name's Smith, and they're awful rich, but I dinna ken the exact nature of their beeziness."

I smiled rather grimly. Probably the station-master was not the only person who knew nothing about their business.

I started off in the direction of the inn, leaving my luggage to be called for. My head was still aching, and I was feeling nauseated from the effects of the anæsthetic. I had no clear plans, but I felt that the first thing needful was breakfast and a hot bath.

As was only to be expected, the landlord and his wife were not expecting me. I pretended to be astonished on hearing that they had not received my telegram reserving a bedroom and sitting-room for a fortnight.

"There's niver a buddy comes here between October and May. There's naught to do once the fushing's over."

"My doctor advised me to come here for my health," I explained.

"Aye, even the London doctors ken there's nae finer air than ye get at Ardgowan. But we're glad to welcome ye, sir; and the mistress wull just pit a match to the fire in the best bedroom. I'm thinking you'll be glad of a bit breakfast. It's no easy to get

provisions up the glen once the winter's begun, but if bacon will do ye——"

I assured him that I wanted nothing better, and when I reached my room, where a huge fire was already burning, I felt almost grateful to the Fate which had brought me to this out-of-the-way place.

From my window, as far as the eye could see, the mountains stretched in an endless chain of serrated peaks. They were covered with snow, the white expanse of which was only broken by plantations of fir trees that stood out in bleak, black patches against the dazzling background.

In the valley a river half ice-bound trickled sluggishly along its pebbly bed. The sun shone brightly over everything, striking sparkles from the snow till the eyes ached with the brilliant reflection.

" The supply of water to the bathroom being nae verra certain, I fillit the hip-bath. I thocht maybe you would tak' your bath in front of the fire."

I thanked Mistress Mackenzie profusely, and for the next ten minutes I revelled in an orgy of soft water and lathering soap.

The fumes of the anæsthetic still lingered in my head sufficiently to prevent my appreciating the feathery scones and heather honey which were brought for my breakfast,

but the strong tea was like nectar to my parched throat.

"A guid sleep wull pit ye a' richt. Dinna leave the bed till I call ye," Mrs. Mackenzie ordered me. I was delighted to obey. No one is better at mothering a man than your true Scotchwoman; in five minutes I was between the sweet-smelling sheets, half asleep. Even as I closed my eyes, a large "3" seemed to float like a veil between me and the gates of sleep. But it faded away, and I sank into blissful unconsciousness.

I awoke four hours later fully recovered. I had a huge appetite, for which Mrs. Mackenzie had made ample provision.

It had begun to snow. I watched the flurry of small dry flakes floating past my window with a feeling of lazy repose. Perhaps the effects of the anæsthetic had not yet entirely worn off; at any rate, I felt very disinclined to move. Yet at the back of all my unwillingness was the knowledge that I must presently bestir myself sufficiently to go and see if Greenwood were really living the life of an ordinary English servant.

I might succeed in discovering nothing; on the other hand, I had a curious feeling that I was on the verge of some discovery.

I sat smoking a pipe till the afternoon light began to grow faint; then I put

on an ulster and searched for Mrs. Mackenzie.

" Ye're no goin' out in this awfu' weather ! " she exclaimed in dismay.

" I must walk off the effects of my big luncheon," I said, laughing, " or I shall have a liver attack. Which is the best way for a sharp walk ? "

" Gin ye turn to the right, when ye're awa' on to the high road, and follow on till ye come to some high iron gates——"

" What house do they belong to ? " I interrupted.

" Ardgowan Lodge. He's a queer sort of buddy that's ta'en the Lodge ; never leaves the grounds and keeps an awfu' big establishment. The lasses tellt me they were half afeared to stay ; there were such strange noises the nicht ; but he pays weel and he is no trouble."

" Is he married ? "

" He's no marrit, and he has a niece that keeps house for him. I'm no denying that she's handsome, but she's queer lookin' for a' that."

I plodded along in the teeth of the wind. It was difficult walking through the thick snow, and once or twice I was tempted to turn back. I had no definite plan, but I knew that I must try and find out whether

Greenwood was really nothing more than an ordinary servant.

Mine seemed a hopeless quest, but I had no other clue to follow.

Sooner than I expected I reached the big iron gates, and I was gradually growing more weary. I decided not to take this easy means of ingress, so I pressed on another quarter of a mile, when I came to a thick belt of fir trees divided from the road by a low stone wall. There was no one in sight. Indeed, the flurry of snow prevented me from being visible at more than a few yards' distance.

I dropped into the plantation and began groping my way in the direction where I believed the house to stand. The wind had dropped and the snow was coming down in heavy flakes. It was eerily silent amongst the pine trees. I could easily have imagined myself in the depths of some Norwegian forest haunted by were-wolves and peopled by the gods from Valhalla.

I shivered, half from cold, half from an undefined feeling of creepiness. Suddenly, without any warning, I came upon an open clearing; in the middle of the clearing was a wooden hut about seven feet high and twenty feet broad. It had two windows high up in the walls, with no glass but with

cross iron bars of great strength. I looked round, but there was no one to be seen. The hut had a door which was securely padlocked. I shook it a little and as I did so I heard a curious noise.

It was half grunt, half bark, and I heard something shuffling inside. I tried to peer under the door, but it fitted too closely to allow me to see anything. Something warned me to return to the shelter of the trees, and I crept back into their dusky shadow.

Hardly had I hidden myself than there was a movement amongst the trees opposite, and a girl walked into the clearing. I looked and looked again, thinking perhaps I was mistaken in the half-light. But my suspicion proved to be right. It was the woman who had drugged me in the train the night before. She was dressed in a crimson coat with a big fur collar, which wrapped her closely in its folds. The coat reached just below her knee; on her feet she had high Russian boots of some soft leather; a close-fitting fur cap completed the kit. Bizarre as was her appearance, it harmonised perfectly with the setting of dark pines and glistening snow.

She walked across to the hut and unlocked the door, closing it behind her. Curiosity prompted me to speak to her. But the

sight of her gave me reminiscent shudders down my spine, and I had no intention of letting myself be seen.

I began to shiver as I crouched in the shadows. The cold was Arctic. With a sudden splash the square windows in the hut glowed orange, against which the black bars stood out in sharp relief. There was something sinister in their appearance. I felt decidedly relieved that I was invisible.

I remained absolutely silent for a quarter of an hour. Then my curiosity became even stronger than my apprehensions. I padded noiselessly across the snow to the door of the hut. Although I could see nothing, I could hear the girl's voice talking in some unknown language. She was speaking softly and caressingly, but her companion—whatever it was—made no reply except an occasional grunt, such as I had heard before.

There was a curious musty smell coming through the crack of the door. It was vaguely reminiscent, but I could not be certain of what it reminded me. I only knew that it revolted me and gave me a feeling of nausea. I listened for perhaps ten minutes, then, hearing the girl move, I scuttled back to the belt of trees.

She came out a moment later and, locking the door behind her, moved away till she

was lost to view amongst the dark pine clumps. Very cautiously I followed. It was not difficult; her footsteps were clearly visible in the fresh snow. I went on till the belt of woodland ceased and I found myself on the edge of a drive. I stopped instinctively, but as I did so my foot caught in a shrub root. I measured my length on the gravel of the drive.

" Are you hurt ? "

I picked myself up and found myself gazing straight into the eyes of the lady of the crimson coat.

" No, thank you," I said formally. My brain was so confused that I could find no words. Our last meeting was not one to which I could very well refer.

" Do you realise you are trespassing on my uncle's property? Come in and have some tea; perhaps I can induce him to forgive you."

" Thanks awfully," I stammered, " but I think my landlady's expecting me back."

" Oh, do come "—and her voice was very low. " I think you owe me something for the nice chocolate I made you last night." Her long, green eyes looked into mine. Was it imagination, or were her lips quivering on the edge of a smile?

"Thank you very much," I said meekly. We walked down the avenue together.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming here last night?" she said. "I would have given you a lift. After Coupar the train's fearfully slow. They unhooked the sleeping-car from the express and put it on to a slow train. My uncle sent the car for me. I got here at eight o'clock this morning. I suppose you didn't get in till nearly eleven?"

"About that." I felt absolutely tongue-tied. You can hardly accuse a charming woman of having drugged you and searched your luggage without producing some small shadow of proof.

The crisp snow crunched beneath our feet. Once she stumbled slightly and caught my arm to save herself. Her fingers remained an instant longer than was necessary within my grasp; their pressure was warm and magnetic. We turned a corner; before me I saw a dark stone house, with the warm light glowing dimly through curtained windows. A dozen stone steps led up to the front door, which was of oak, heavily barred, studded with nails and bands of iron.

She rang the bell. The door was opened by a man in livery. I gave a hasty glance at his face: it was not Greenwood.

CHAPTER XIV

WHO INTRODUCES ME TO TROTSKY

I EXPERIENCED a slight qualm as I heard the heavy door close behind me. It was ridiculous, on the face of things, to walk quietly of my own accord into the lion's den, but something stronger than common sense was driving me on. I felt as though here, and here alone, would I find the mysterious lost document.

The hall was magnificently proportioned. The walls were of rough stone, in some places as much as six feet thick, covered with horns and heads. Evidently the owner of the house was a big-game hunter. There were two or three fine tiger-skins upon the floor and a particularly large lion, with realistically-stuffed head. We followed the footman up a rough stone staircase, into a small sitting-room which might have almost been hollowed out of the walls. Even here the rough stone was left in its primitive state, its only covering being some pieces of marvellous old tapestry. The room was

not crowded with furniture. One or two large arm-chairs and a huge sofa were all that it contained, except for a round oak table which stood in front of the open fire. Tea, apparently, had just been brought in.

Weird shadows danced upon the walls from the flickering flame which roared in blue and green tongues up the chimney. A middle-aged man rose to his feet as we entered.

"Uncle Herbert, I've brought this gentleman in to tea. It was he who so kindly lent me a rug in the train last night."

"I am delighted to meet you, sir. I understand that you were most kind to my niece on the journey."

"I wish I could have done more," I said conventionally. The situation puzzled me. This man looked like some prosperous merchant. He had a bald head, blue eyes which blinked behind convex glasses, and a rounded and comfortable anatomy.

"My name is Grant," he continued. "You may have heard of Grant & Allen, the soap manufacturers."

I smiled assent.

"I have just bought this house." He had a smooth, rich voice, rather like one of his own scented soaps. "It seems to be

the genuine article—secret chamber—even a ghost." He laughed heartily.

" My name is Warburton," I said. " I don't think your niece and I exchanged names last night in the train."

She gave a little reminiscent smile—and when she smiled she was the incarnation of age-old feminine allure.

" My name is Olga Englehardt. My father was a naturalised Russian—in fact, he came to England when he was two years old."

" He married my sister," Mr. Grant explained in his creamy voice.

" You are half Russian and half English ? " I asked.

" I had a Spanish grandmother, which complicates things a little. . . . Will you make the tea, Uncle Herbert, while I change my wet clothes ? "

" My sister died two years after my brother-in-law," he said, offering me a cigarette. " Olga has been my constant companion ever since. No doubt I shall not be permitted to keep her long. She will meet her Prince Charming and I shall be left alone."

His manner was precisely that of the unctuous, successful merchant prince. I asked myself rather doubtfully what I was

doing *dans cette galère*. However, I was hungry. The room was warm and attractive, whilst Olga—well, I felt pretty certain there was some mystery about that young lady. Whatever it might be, my job was to find it out. She came back a quarter of an hour later, dressed in a soft turquoise-coloured tea-gown which glittered with heavy embroidery. There seemed to be a good deal of fur about it, too. Her dark-red hair accentuated her half-savage, half-Byzantine appearance.

Tea was a substantial meal, with scones, honey and new-laid eggs. These last for Mr. Grant, who disposed of two with visible satisfaction.

“I believe in feeding the inner man,” he said fatly, “though if prices continue to rise even eggs will soon become an unattainable luxury.”

The question of the mark on my hand had been exercising my mind to a considerable extent, but I had finally decided to make no bones about the matter and to let them see it.

If these were the people that I believed them to be, they knew all about the sign already; if they were merely innocent and ordinary citizens, it would convey nothing to them.

I drew my glove off below the table. When Olga handed me my cup of tea I put out my branded hand to take it.

I heard her give a sort of gasp, then she turned very white. Mr. Grant never hesitated. " Excuse my mentioning it " —his voice had lost its creamy quality —" but what is that mark upon your hand ? "

I felt inclined to answer, " If you don't know, no one else does," but I merely said, " It's the number 3."

" You must forgive our apparent curiosity," Olga murmured hastily, " but you cannot imagine what we have suffered lately from that sign."

" You ! " I ejaculated, quite nonplussed.

" I would hesitate to say that it was in any way connected with the supernatural. I do not believe in spooks and phantoms." Grant looked even more unctuous as he spoke.

" Oh," I said lamely.

" Were it possible, I would say that Bolshevist influence is at the root of the whole matter."

" Bolshevism ! "

" Unfortunately, having been fairly successful in my business undertakings—due, I may say, to a strict attention to business—I have

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incurred the wrath of those who have not succeeded to a similar extent."

Mr. Grant spoke in such measured periods that it was like listening to the sonorous roll of a large organ.

"Uncle Herbert is speaking of his employees," Olga explained a little impatiently.

"The men in the employment of Grant & Allen have always received just—I might even say liberal—treatment, but, with the ingratitude common to that class, they have responded by accusing me of amassing wealth at their expense. When it became known that I had been given a Government contract for supplying soap to the army, they had the impertinence to demand a rise in wages."

"Then do you seriously think that your trouble, whatever it is, is due to Bolshevist influences?"

Olga broke in before her uncle could reply.

"I don't," she said decisively. "You may call me what you like—ignorant, superstitious—but I believe we are haunted by some supernatural power."

"What happened?" I asked curiously.

"We've been here now six months," she began. "When you met me in the train last night I was returning from a flying visit to London. My uncle retired from the

business about eight months ago, and bought this house. It was about three nights after we arrived here; I was groping my way along the passage to my room, as the electric lights were not yet in order, when I heard a voice—at my elbow it seemed—murmuring the words 'Number 3.' I called out 'Who is there?' but there was no answer. The next moment I felt an ice-cold hand upon my wrist. I was so frightened I almost fainted, but I tried to persuade myself it had been nothing but imagination on my part. Two nights later I went into my room about eleven o'clock at night. Before I could light the candle I saw shining upon the floor, although the curtains were drawn and no light came through them, the figure '3' as though it had been cut out of silver."

"It sounds very extraordinary," I said doubtfully. The girl's face was white; her long green eyes gazed straight into mine with a tense look.

I felt far from comfortable. Those eyes reminded me forcibly of last night, and I felt very much alone in this house of mystery.

"I think Olga's mind dwells too much on the supernatural," Grant said soothingly. "I am convinced that Bolshevism is at the

root of this matter. My employees appear to be determined that I shall not enjoy the fruits of my labour. If they think they are going to frighten me by a few cheap tricks, they are mistaken."

"When you talk of Bolshevism," I asked, "do you mean an advanced Socialism?"

"I do not," he answered emphatically. "The majority of people in England are blind to the evil in their midst. You do not even guess how Bolshevism has poisoned the minds of many otherwise sane individuals. Many a man—who to you appears an ordinary citizen—dreams of delivering this country into the hands of the 'Red Terror.' They believe it will mean increased wealth and prosperity for themselves. The Red agents in this country are legion. The means taken to prevent their undermining social opinion are hopelessly inadequate."

"I suppose it is sometimes difficult to locate them?"

"Exactly. When we were fighting German espionage we were fighting in the open; now it is like being attacked by an ambushed enemy."

His words were almost similar to those used by Gyp. I wondered what she was doing; the very thought of her made me restless. I rose to my feet.

" Don't go yet." Olga's voice was very pleading. " Do stay a little longer."

I sat down again reluctantly. The servant came in and cleared away tea. Where was Greenwood ? I wondered. How was I going to discover his whereabouts ?

We sat for a time without speaking ; leaping flames danced and crackled, throwing out sudden little spurts of blue and green. I watched them sleepily, and Grant's voice made me jump.

" Kindly sharpen this pencil for me, my dear Olga."

" Let me," I said, producing a penknife.

Whether I was careless or whether the half-light confused me, I cannot say, but the thing slipped and cut my thumb pretty badly. I wound my handkerchief round it. Olga leaned forward.

" Let me look," she said.

" It's nothing," I protested, but she took my wrist lightly between her fingers.

Many people will not believe the following incident. I can only assure you that it happened just as I tell it to you.

Any Russian will vouch for the fact that such occurrences do take place, although they are not everyday happenings.

The girl took my hand in hers, as I said before, and muttered a few words in what

I knew to be Russian, though I cannot do more than recognise it as such when I hear it.

The blood was welling out of the cut quickly and it looked as though nothing but tight bandaging would stop it. Two minutes, perhaps, after she had begun speaking, the bleeding stopped automatically. Not gradually, but entirely—as though you had turned a tap which had been till then turned full on.

I looked at her in amazement and her green eyes returned the glance. There was nothing now in their depths to make me shudder. Only a strange light glowed within them—the light that the snow reflects in Northern latitudes when the aurora borealis is playing across the sky. They were as lambent as the inner caves of some great icebergs, where the green dimness is like the depths of a huge forest.

“How did you do it?” I gasped.

“It is the word against blood,” she said simply. “I learnt it when I was a child. We lived in Russia from the time I was four years old till I was ten. My father wished me to learn the language.”

“Can anyone else do it?”

She laughed a little.

“Many—in Russia—with other and far more wonderful things. There is the word against burning, there is even the word

against death ; but few know that. It requires much knowledge and much study."

" It is marvellous," I said simply. My thumb was absolutely cured ; only a thin red line showed where the knife had slipped.

" Now," Olga said softly, " perhaps you can realise why, to me at least, the supernatural is not unnatural."

" What do you think of this ? " I turned towards Grant.

" I never concern myself with what I cannot understand," he said easily. " There is bound to be a rational and scientific explanation of everything. When we cannot fathom the reason for a thing, we are apt to call it supernatural. A savage would think an aeroplane was the work of some evil spirit, but his thinking so would not make it the less a scientific fact."

" My uncle is incorrigibly material," she said smiling. " Don't listen to him ; let me tell you your fortune."

" Do you do it by cards ? "

" No, by holding your hand in mine and looking into your eyes."

We sat down and she took both my hands in hers, while she gazed deeply into my eyes.

" You're very bewildered at present," she began, " something is worrying you. You

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can't see your way clearly. Another human being's mentality dominates your existence to such an extent that you are deprived of the power of unbiased action. Do you care for her very much ? ”

Her low voice was almost husky.

I felt soothed and drowsy and Gyp seemed far away and shadowy. Besides, in my heart of hearts, I knew that she would never care for me. If anyone had a chance, it was old Allan. Something in his dog-like devotion touched a chord in Gyp's restless boyish nature ; he knew exactly how to handle her and she turned to him instinctively.

“ Do you care very much ? ” she asked again. “ Your love is not returned—do you realise it ? ”

“ I really don't quite know what you are talking about,” I parried.

“ You're a difficult subject when it comes to telling fortunes. You won't let yourself go. You fight to retain your own individuality.”

“ This is really good-bye.” I rose as I spoke. “ I have had enough magic for one evening.”

“ Well, you must come again. I must go and give Trotsky his supper. So I'll come with you for the first part of your journey.”

“ Who is Trotsky ? ” I inquired.

" Wait and see," she said, laughing.

She stopped in the hall to put on her high boots. She wrapped herself in a great sable coat which looked as if it must be very heavy and was, in fact, as light as a feather.

We went down the drive and struck through the woods in the direction of the clearing, where I had first seen her.

There stood the hut clearly visible in the moonlight. Wind and snow had both ceased and the sky was bright with burning stars. She unlocked the padlock. " Wait a minute," she called over her shoulder; " Trotsky is not always amiable with strangers."

She switched on the light. I blinked for a moment in the glare and there in the opposite corner was a large baboon. When he saw me, he made a low chattering noise as if displeased.

" Don't be silly, Trotsky." Olga put her arm round his neck and the brute snuggled up to her with evident pleasure.

" This is a friend," she went on, " shake hands nicely."

Trotsky put out a large hairy paw, which I took gingerly.

" He knows you now," Olga assured me. " He'd never attack you unless he were ordered to do so."

" Is he ever loose ? "

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"Always after ten o'clock," she said carelessly. "He's a better guard than any dog."

"Would he attack a man?" I asked.

She nodded. "He's not a nice customer. He's got some pretty little tricks."

I made a silent vow to remain indoors after ten o'clock.

"You're quite safe," she teased me. "You've been properly introduced. Unless you annoyed me, which I am sure you would never do, he would always treat you with great politeness."

"I'm glad of that," I said fervently.

"You must like Trotsky. He's really rather a dear. He loves me, don't you?" She rubbed her face in his rough coat.

It was not a pretty sight. I felt I wanted to get home. "Good night, and many thanks for tea."

She left the baboon and laid her hand on my arm.

Again her wonderful eyes glowed and shone. I forgot my disgust.

"Promise me you will come again," she pleaded, "it is so lonely here."

At that moment I would have promised her anything.

I kissed her hand, and started back through the woods.

I stumbled through the thick snow, my mind full of fancies. Who were these people and where was Greenwood? Was I mistaken in my theories? There was something about Olga which awaked excitement in my brain.

I fell asleep with the firelight throwing shadows on the walls. The snow drifted in at the open window. The dragon-teeth of the mountain tops were etched in sharp relief against the dark-blue sky. My dreams were a wild medley of fantastic images.

CHAPTER XV

OF HAPPENINGS UNBELIEVABLE

I SLEPT for several hours without moving; I still had some arrears to make up—then I awoke feeling restless, and extraordinarily energetic. I looked at my luminous watch; it was half-past one. The stars were shining brightly in the clear sky. Outside you could almost hear the snow freezing.

I went back to bed and, lighting the candle, tried to read. But I was quite unable to concentrate my attention upon the printed page. Between me and it obtruded the figure of Olga Englehardt, with her half-attractive, half-repulsive fascination.

I felt sure that she was in some way connected with Bolshevist propaganda, if with nothing more serious. Greenwood was somewhere in that ill-omened house; my job was to locate him and to find the paper.

Yet, knowing all this, I was utterly unable to bring my faculties to bear upon the situation. A strange sense of lassitude

possessed me. I experienced that sensation peculiar to nightmares in which one's limbs and brain turn to cotton-wool. No one could deny Olga had charm, I argued. It did no harm to acknowledge it. In admitting that it existed, I was able more effectually to steel myself against her power.

For powerful she was and no one knew it better than myself. She was utterly unlike any other woman that I had ever met. Her bizarre way of dressing ; her exotic colouring ; a certain undefined sense of secret knowledge which permeated her personality, all combined to make her unnaturally alluring.

" Unnatural " was the precise word which described her. She had none of Gyp's impulsive charm of manner. In many ways the latter was frankly a child of nature. It was only the ice-keen clearness of her brain that prevented her from giving way to the impulse of the moment. But she was straight all through ; whatever she did, outside her work, harmed no one but herself.

On the other hand, Olga Englehardt would work and plot with no other reason than sheer love of intrigue, while the cold sensuality of her nature was appalling. The Spanish and Russian blood in her veins was a mixture, capable of producing a mystic, a

world-famous courtesan, or a creature to whom no cruelty however refined could come amiss. Incidentally, she was a combination of all three.

It must not be thought I was capable of analysing her nature that winter night as I lay in bed and tried in vain to sleep. It is only now, viewed from a distance, by the cold light of reason, that I could see her as she really was. I blew out the candle and pulled back the curtain so that I could feel the pure, chill night air blowing in on me, and could watch the burning stars flicker and scintillate in the blue sky. There was something soothing in the vast silence which brooded over the whole earth; gradually I fell into that delicious state which is neither waking nor sleeping.

My body drifted away on a tide of unconsciousness, but in the strange way that sometimes happens, no sooner had my physical faculties become numb than my mind began to work. It worked as clearly as if it were performing its everyday duty.

In my dream, I felt an overpowering longing to see Olga again. I knew—how, I do not know—that she was waiting for me in the clearing outside the hut. Even in my dream, I argued with myself that it was impossible and absurd to meet anyone at

this hour of the night. But it were as if something outside myself were dragging me forward. I dreamt I got out of bed, put on a pair of boots and a fur coat, and stole downstairs.

The moon seemed to be shining very brightly. Outside the hut, her shadow dead-black on the white snow, I saw Olga. She was wrapped in a fur cape and her high boots were of red leather. I felt her green eyes drawing me towards her as a magnet draws the needle. I shuddered with joy and horror at the same moment.

She held out her arms and everything was blotted out for me in one wild moment of delicious ecstasy. I crushed her to me, and her red lips met mine, in a feverish kiss.

I tried to draw her gently towards the hut but she resisted, drawing herself away. I had but one thought in my head and I hardly knew what I was doing. But again she looked straight into my eyes and something within me dissolved in a spasm of fear and delight. I was conscious of nothing more till I woke to find the winter sun glowing palely into my room. Mrs. Mackenzie stood by my bed with a cup of tea and a freshly-buttered bannock.

My throat was feeling parched and sore. I drank the tea thankfully ; I was aching in

every limb—why, I could not understand, as I had felt perfectly well when I woke up in the night.

I crept under the clothes again, determined to have my breakfast in bed. Mrs. Mackenzie hurried into the room, a look of consternation on her face.

“Look at your boots,” she said dramatically, “they’re fairly soaking; whenever did ye get them so wet? I cleaned the pair ye had on last night, now look at these!”

They certainly had the appearance of having been used in the mud and rain. I was at a loss to account for it. They had been packed, already cleaned and polished, by the efficient Kendricks, and patent leather shoes are not the sort of footwear for outside use in the Highlands in mid-winter.

As far as I knew, I had not even seen them since I left London. I looked at them in blank bewilderment.

“It’s very odd,” I admitted. “I don’t remember putting them on at all.”

My hostess shook her head resignedly.

“They’re sonsy things,” she remarked, “but no to be worn up here; I misdoubt me that I’ll never get them to look so fine and shiny again.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I said. “Do you think you could let me have a cup of tea

and a piece of toast in bed? I'm sorry to bother you, but I have a sore throat and my head aches damnably. I beg your pardon," I added hastily.

Mrs. Mackenzie smiled indulgently.

"You're no needin' to fash yourself over usin' a few swear words in front of me; Jamie's a guid man and a kind husband, but whiles his language is no all it micht be. I am real consairned aboot yer heid and yer doctor sendin' ye up here for yer health an' all. Wull I no send Doctor Wedderburn a word? He's an able mon and a kind buddy an' he'd be rale pleased to hav' a crack wi' ye."

I shook my head. I was feeling pretty seedy, but I was determined not to fall into any doctor's hands. I mistrust and fear them. How many times have I visited some famous specialist, to be told: "Keep your windows open at night; drink plenty of cold water; my fee is three guineas!"

"I don't think I need a doctor yet," I said. "I expect a cup of tea and a dose of quinine will put me right."

Mrs. Mackenzie hurried away. I lay back and tried to find a cool spot on the pillow for my burning forehead. My imagination began to run riot, and I thought of how I would appreciate a pair of soft hands to

soothe away the pain. Some hands have a magical healing in their touch, and I was sure that Olga's would have the power to charm away any headache, however severe.

Then I pulled myself together and reproached my saner self for being a fool and worse.

Mrs. Mackenzie came back, lighted the fire, tidied things up and gave me a cup of strong, hot tea. The sound of a bell pealing through the house made me jump.

"That'll be the post, I'm thinkin'," she said excitedly.

I was not expecting anything. I had given "Ardgowan Post Office" as my address to Kendrick, with strict injunctions not to divulge my whereabouts.

Mrs. Mackenzie came back full of importance.

"There's a parcel for ye at the post. McNaughton was speiring me if I'd ever heard the name. 'Losh,' I tellt him, 'fetch it up. The puir lad's here richt enough, but he's sair farfaughten wi' fever.'

"'I'm nae entitled,' McNaughton tellt me, 'to fecht it up. The gentleman should come awa' doun and fecht it. It's marked "Poste Restante." ' "

Mrs. Mackenzie was getting excited.

"'Dinna stand havering,' I said tae him. 'I tell ye the puir laddie's daft with a pain in his heid—maybe 'twill hearten him. Hoo do ye ken it's nae a present fra his young leddy?'"

"I wish I had a young lady to send me presents," I said. "But as I haven't, I can't think what it can be. Is he going to bring it?"

"Ou aye, he's no a bad lad if ye speak him fair. He's awa' to fetch it. He'll be back in five minutes."

Even such a small thing as the prospect of a parcel cheered me up. I felt energetic enough to brush my hair; no doubt if I had been a woman I should have powdered my nose. That solace being denied me, I lit a cigarette, but after a few puffs I threw it away as a bad job. It tasted more like burnt sawdust than a "Royal Beauty."

"Here's yer parcel," Mrs. Mackenzie announced, "noo I'll be awa' to red up the house a bit."

No one possesses more perfect tact than a Scotchwoman. She guessed that I was overstrung and wretched, and she was never garrulous or prying. If I wanted her, I only had to ring, when she appeared, panting, after the steep stairs, but she was never in the way.

The parcel was of a small, square shape. I fingered it curiously. I am one of those absurd people who, when they receive a letter in an unknown handwriting, waste half an hour in examining it from all points of view instead of at once opening it and solving the mystery.

An unopened parcel is even more alluring. It may contain anything, but once it is opened the excitement of anticipation is over, and nothing but the concrete and very often disappointing reality remains.

I studied my treasure trove for fully five minutes, finally deciding that it must be my shirt that Kendrick had forgotten to pack.

My head was again aching violently, and I opened it at last with no interest. It was carefully packed in several layers of tissue paper. As the last one fell away I found a soft crimson-leather frame with inside a photograph of Gyp.

It was Gyp as I had first seen her, in a woollen jersey and short kilted skirt. Her lips were slightly parted and her wide grey eyes looked out of the picture with the half-serious, half-laughing expression that I knew so well.

It was as though a breath of fresh air had blown into a heated room, it brought back the past so vividly. There was the heavy

wave of soft hair falling over each ear ; the straight, fine line of eyebrow ; and the soft curve of her mouth with the upward lift at each corner.

I could almost imagine that Gyp was in the room, and I cursed myself for having let any other woman come between us.

I slipped the picture under the pillow and tried to sleep. My chest felt uncomfortably sore. Each breath that I drew hurt like a knife, but mentally I was quite calm, and presently I fell into a heavy doze.

I don't know for how long I slept. I awoke with a cough tearing my lungs to pieces, so it seemed to me. I struggled to sit up, the perspiration pouring off me ; but the pain which went through me like a knife made me fall back on the pillow.

" Lie quiet, laddie," I heard a voice say, and I saw that a man was standing beside my bed.

" Have ye a poultice ready, Mistress Mackenzie ? "

A second later I felt a hot mass on my chest and the soothing sting and draw of the mustard.

From then onwards, my impressions are of the haziest. It was a nightmare of struggling with that ghastly cough with alternate blissful moments of peace when I

seemed to be drifting away into oblivion, only to be brought back to reality by another spasm.

Then through a mist of pain I heard the same voice say, "It can do no harm. I must leave ye both for a wee while till I look in at David Shaw's and see how the bairn's faring. Tak a rest now, Mistress Mackenzie; he'll be quiet enough for a while and the young leddy will look after him fine. It's a bit of luck that she happened in."

I felt a faint prick; then the full tide of the morphia swept through my veins and I seemed to sink to the bottom of a translucent, glimmering sea. On the surface I knew the pain was waiting to catch me, but as long as I was surrounded by that gleaming haze I was safe. I crouched upon the bed of the sea and held my breath.

I suppose that morphia affects everyone differently, but to me the succeeding hours were one long dream of many-coloured fancies. It was only a gradually-increasing sense of thirst that brought me back to reality.

"I want something to drink," I said weakly. Instantly the cold rim of a glass was pressed against my lips. The slightly acid liquid trickled down my parched throat, and I half opened my eyes.

The room was dark except for the flame-flickers of the tiny gleam of an old-fashioned night-light. Olga was holding the drink to my lips. Her hair hung down in two long red-gold plaits which nearly reached her waist.

" Is the pain bad ? " she asked softly, and she laid her hand upon my hot forehead. It was just as I had dreamed it would be—snow-soft and cool ; it drew away the throbbing pain until it had almost disappeared.

I tried to speak, but a spasm of coughing prevented me. After it was over I lay back gasping for breath.

She laid a wet handkerchief, soaked with something which smelt of lilies and also of pine trees, upon my forehead. Then she lifted me up as though I were a child, and fanned me gently.

I put out my hand and clutched her wrist feverishly. " Am I going to die ? " I asked.

" Not if I can help it," she said, smiling. " Will you trust yourself to me ? " I nodded my head weakly and she bent down and laid her lips on my mouth. I believe she would have kissed a dead man in his coffin if he had attracted her.

" I am left in charge for two hours," she said. " Mrs. Mackenzie has gone to lie down until Dr. Wedderburn comes back.

They think I can be trusted to look after you for a short time. I can do the ordinary things that any trained nurse would do, and you may live or you may die. But if you will let me look after you in my own way, I will save you."

"Save me," I murmured.

She seemed to my feverish imagination like a figure out of some Scandinavian saga. Indeed, I was so mazed with fever and wracked with pain that I cannot entirely disentangle my delirious fancies from what really took place. In any case, her remedies were very different from any found in the British Pharmacopœia.

She blew out the night-light and threw more logs on the fire; they burnt with a vivid blue flame which showed how hard it must be freezing, and their light filled the room with dancing shadows. She moved noiselessly backwards and forwards. I watched her through half-closed eyes, dreading another attack of coughing.

Vaguely I saw her light a small lamp and on its flame she put what looked like a gold dish. She poured liquid into it, stirring meanwhile, and then she added something else.

The flame died away and she brought me the mixture in a glass. It looked like

liquid gold, grains of gold floating in an amber fluid. " Drink it," she said ; " don't be afraid. It will bewilder you and make you feel strange, but it will cure you."

She sat down on the edge of the bed, holding the glass to my lips, then she supported me in her arms.

As the liquid flowed down my throat my limbs seemed to relax, and I felt the dry constriction of my chest lessen. A warm glow ran through my veins, and the bed, instead of being hard and unyielding, became soft as a heap of rose leaves. I stretched myself luxuriously, and I felt a pair of warm arms steal round my body and hold me tightly.

I can't remember anything clearly after that. I was conscious of the soft pressure of those enfolding arms and sometimes I heard a voice talking, and I think I answered. Then came a period when I wandered in a world of fantasy where things were real and solid and yet impossible.

The wall-paper had bunches of holly on which sat strange birds of paradise ; they left the walls and, perching upon the foot of my bed, they talked to me, and I understood. By my side hung a picture where an elephant and a tiger were engaged in fierce combat ; presently they descended and

strolled about the room, and their conversation was as plain to me as the words of a friend. Through it all I could feel my wracked body relaxing and the liquid running through my veins like golden fire.

You may tell me it was some mixture of hashish, but I know better. There was more in it than mere drugs and compounds. I could feel how some powerful will dominated and enfolded me, and I gave myself up to it with delight.

That night is indelibly impressed upon my memory for all time. When I think of it I am filled with horror, and yet even now some of the sweet, unholy fascination remains.

That night Olga possessed me, body and soul, and I do not think that her influence can ever quite fade away. Presently even the birds and the beasts disappeared. An intense silence brooded over the room. All pain and discomfort had left me and I floated on the bosom of the vast tideless sea into a haven of sleep. As I touched the shore of that blessed refuge, I felt something drop lightly as a flower on my lips and a fragrance of red roses filled the air.

I opened my eyes upon a room filled with sunlight and the cheerful, matter-of-fact atmosphere the bustling hour of midday

brings. I felt weak as a baby, but extraordinarily well. I lifted my voice and wailed for food.

Dr. Wedderburn and Mrs. Mackenzie came in with a rush.

"Will you bring the lad a cup of soup?" the doctor said cheerfully.

"Soup!" I protested, "I want bacon and eggs."

"Do ye no ken the proverb, 'Want must be your master'?" Wedderburn said, his eyes twinkling. "Asking for bacon, indeed, after the fright ye've been givin' us!"

"Well, I'm all right now."

"No thanks to me either," he answered frankly. "Miss Englehardt's a fine nurse, but she's more than that. She's got a will that it would be hard to beat."

"How do you mean?" I asked curiously; "do you think you can cure sickness by will power?"

"Well," he said whimsically, "maybe your Harley Street doctors wouldn't acknowledge it. I live alone here through the long dark winters, and I subscribe to the theories that they would be ashamed to recognise. Will power can do most things. Anyhow," he added, "it was she who saved you last night."

"How did she know I was ill?"

"I know no more than I know how ye

came to be on the brink of septic pneumonia ; she happened in about six o'clock.

" ' I hear the gentleman that's staying with you is ill,' she told Mistress Mackenzie ; ' I and my uncle know him. Will you ask the doctor if I can be of any help ? ' "

" I'll nae deny I was glad to see her. She looked bonny and braw, with her white clothes and her veil. And you were in a creetical condition."

" White clothes and veil ! " I exclaimed, " she wasn't wearing them when I saw her."

" Was she not ? " Doctor Wedderburn smiled. " I don't think that ye were in a fit state to notice clothes. She was wearin' them when I left her, and she had them on when I returned."

He evidently thought I had been delirious. I said nothing. I wanted desperately to keep up the homely, everyday atmosphere which pervaded the room.

" As I was sayin'," he went on, " it was no mere nursing, but will power that pulled ye through."

" ' He shan't die,' she said to me, as quiet and confident as though she could prevent it, and she had a look in her face of marvelous resolution."

" ' He's as bad as he can be,' I told her, but she just laughed.

" ' I know,' she said, ' but I'll save him.'

" When I came back after being away down the glen to David Shaw's bairn, ye were cool and sleepin' quietly."

" Was the child bad ? " I asked.

" Death was abroad in the glen this night," he said solemnly. " The bairn died. There are times when the snow's on the ground and 'whiles ye can see the Northern Lights, that ye can smell death in the air. I never thought ye'd live," he acknowledged simply. Then he laughed, and it did me good to see his clever, weather-beaten face wrinkle into lines of pleasure.

" However, ye're fine this morn, and we'll call it another proof of my marveelous skill ! None of your Harley Street men could have done as much." He gave a prodigious wink. " Now, here's yer soup. Drink it down like a guid lad and if ye're canny and hae anither sleep we'll think aboot an egg when ye wake up."

The soup was hot and good, and I was asleep almost before I had finished it, nor did I wake till late in the afternoon.

I found Olga and the doctor both in the room.

" Here's ye nurse come to tak tea with ye," he said jovially. " Are ye hungry ? "

I was, and the sight of a freshly-boiled

egg made me even more ravenous. Dr. Wedderburn left in a few moments, promising to look in again that evening.

Olga had brought a bunch of hot-house lilies which she arranged in a large vase. She left the curtains undrawn, and the contrast between the snowy scene outside and the warm, firelit room was extraordinarily fascinating.

She poured out tea and prepared my egg, while all the time I was hunting for words to begin the conversation.

"You saved my life last night," I said at last boldly.

She looked up from her task and smiled.

"I did what I could," she murmured; "since it was my fault that you were ill, it was only fair."

"Your fault?" I said blankly.

"Don't you know how you caught your cold?" The words were so softly spoken I could barely hear them.

"No—what do you mean?"

"Have you forgotten the hut in the wood, the night before last?" I started, and my heart gave a jump.

"That dream—did you dream it too?"

"It was no dream. I wanted you, I wanted you so much that I willed you to come." Her voice grew deeper. "You

Englishmen have no conception of what love means. It is merely a passing emotion with you. You cannot conceive what it is to be obsessed with passion for a person ; to be so absorbed in them that you cease to be yourself and become part of them.”

“ Did you will me to come out and meet you ? ” I asked incredulously.

“ You see, I love you,” she said simply.

“ But—but you’ve only known me a few days,” I stammered.

“ Oh, don’t be so cold and prosaic,” she cried passionately. “ You don’t manufacture love ; it springs up like a white, devouring flame ; what has time to do with it ? How can you measure it and weigh it, and dole it out ? ”

She stood close beside my bed. I could see her breath coming in quick gasps and smell the sweet, heavy scent she always wore.

“ I don’t ask you to be faithful to me,” she said softly ; “ just love me a little while you are here. I am very lonely, and sometimes very frightened. I believe my uncle goes in peril of his life.”

“ Do you mean from Bolshevists ? ”

“ Yes.” She shivered a little.

“ You don’t really believe that Bolshevism will ever gain much power in England, do you ? ”

"You all think that," she said earnestly ; "you don't realise its power. Communism is not a creed preached by a handful of ignorant peasants. It is a force with some of the mightiest brains in the world behind it. If you knew the names of some of the greatest in the land who secretly hold its tenets and who help its cause by every means in their power, you would marvel."

I could see her slender figure silhouetted against the window. She pulled the curtains, lighted the lamp and rearranged my pillow.

"Do you know a man called Greenwood ?" I asked suddenly. I watched her closely.

"You mean my uncle's new valet ? He was frightfully excited when he heard your name ; he was your servant, wasn't he ?"

"For as long as it suited him," I said grimly.

"Yes, he told me he had to leave you suddenly, because his wife was ill. He was very distressed about it. Would you like him to come and tidy your things or shave you ?"

"No, thank you," I said wearily.

"You're tired." She shaded the light, took away a pillow, and made me lie down.

"Good night, sleep well."

"Of course I shan't sleep," I said peevishly, "considering I've slept all day."

“ Yes, you will,” she whispered, “ I say you will.”

“ I’m so tired,” I complained childishly. I felt intolerably depressed. “ Must you go ? ”

She smiled.

“ Please, please ”—I held out my arms—
“ kiss me. You’re wonderful, you’re divine.”

She bent down slowly, reluctantly even, but I dragged her face down to mine and kissed her hungrily.

Her lips were as cold as ice.

CHAPTER XVI

I RECEIVE A MESSAGE FROM GYP

FROM that day my convalescence was rapid, and very soon I was allowed to sit up by the fire. Dr. Wedderburn was an extraordinarily clever doctor. Over and above his medical qualities he was an interesting man. His mind was keen and he was always open to receive new impressions. Far from his secluded existence making him narrow-minded, it seemed to have developed his reasoning powers to a wonderful degree. He had read translations of abstruse German philosophers of whose names, even, I was ignorant.

I should have liked to have been able to consult him openly about my own particular worries and puzzles, but as I was obliged to keep most of the matter secret, I could say nothing, and we only mentioned Ardgowan Lodge casually in conversation.

He was a great admirer of Olga's from the material, as well as from the intellectual

point of view. She had not been to see me since that evening and subconsciously, the fact worried me. It was like the tiny, irritating prick of a thorn, a small annoyance of which I was always conscious.

This particular evening I was sitting alone over the fire with a large Scotch tea spread in front of me. I was aggrieved, with the unreasoning, childish petulance of invalidism, that the doctor had not dropped in to see me.

Then suddenly, out of the blue, such a wave of insistent longing for Olga came over me that I felt absolutely faint. It was more than mental; it was tangible. I felt as though ropes were cast around me which were dragging me towards her. The perspiration broke out on my forehead and I started up in my chair. I was fully dressed except for my boots.

I rang the bell violently. My poor old hostess came tumbling up the stairs, white-faced and panting.

"Are ye worse, laddie?" she gasped.

But even the sight of her distressed face failed to bring me to my senses.

"I want my boots."

"Yer boots, what for are ye wanting boots? Gae back to bed and the doctor'll come and hae a gude crack wi' ye."

I almost laughed aloud. It was evident that she thought I had had a relapse and was delirious.

"I'm sick of being stuck indoors," I said roughly. "I want to go for a walk."

She laid her work-worn old hand upon my arm.

"I ken it must be lonely for ye, wi' no one but an old buddy like misel aboot, but be reasonable and ye'll soon be able to gang awa' back to London. Are ye no comfortable? Can I get ye onnything? I'll dae a' I can—but dinna gae oot."

Her voice almost broke in her anxiety, but nothing moved me.

Looking back, I feel sick when I think of the poor woman's anxiety and her never-ceasing care for me. Some invisible force, stronger than any feelings of decency or gratitude, had me in its power. A cold rage possessed me when she laid feeble hands on me.

I think I would have knocked her down, but at that moment the door-knocker below gave a loud summons and her face lit up with pleasure.

"Bide a wee," she said hastily, "it's surely the doctor."

She hurried downstairs, looking anxiously over her shoulder to see if I were following,

but, from the moment that I heard the knock, that impelling desire left me.

I could have cried with relief. I sat down. Mrs. Mackenzie opened the door, her face wreathed in smiles.

"You'll no be wantin' to gae oot the noo, I'm thinking," she said. "Here's a bonnie visitor for ye."

Olga came in radiant and vivid.

"Do I hear Mrs. Mackenzie say you wanted to go out? Are you mad?"

"'Deed it's dull for him here," the old Scotchwoman protested, "but you'll be fine company for him." She closed the door softly behind her.

"Whatever made you want to go out?" Olga asked casually.

I looked at her in bewilderment. She must have known she had been willing me to come to her.

"I wanted to see you."

The words came unwillingly from my lips. Now that she was with me, I felt so sane and calm that I had forgotten the wild tumult of a few moments ago.

She said nothing, but stretched herself with a long sigh in the one easy chair that the room possessed.

Her movements were always feline and graceful. She reminded me of some wild

creature which has been caged for so long that it has acquired an outward veneer of domesticity, but is inwardly as savage as the day it was born.

She stretched out her feet to the blaze.

"Ugh, how cold I am," she shivered. "You keep your rooms only just above freezing point. I don't mind the bitterest weather outside; I love feeling the half-frozen snow upon my face, but I like to come into a really hot house with banks of flowers, and soft fur rugs."

She snuggled down in the chair and shivered.

"I believe my shoes are wet."

She stretched out her foot towards me. I went down upon my knees and unfastened the laces.

She had the long narrow shape and over-arched instep of the true Slav. As the warm flesh touched my hand, a curious electric thrill ran through me. I bent and kissed the foot. She laughed lazily and passed her hand across my head.

"Do you like me a little?" she asked.

"You know I do. I want to be near you always—to feel you close to me."

Then, with one of the quick changes which was so characteristic of her, "Come back and finish your convalescence with us. I am so

lonely and so frightened. I feel you would help me. Will you come ? "

" Really !—you mean it ? "

She nodded.

" Get Mrs. Mackenzie to pack your things. I'll send the car round in half an hour. Oh, and by the way, I've got something of yours. You had a photograph in a frame under your pillow the night you were so ill."

I flushed. I had completely forgotten Gyp's picture.

" Unfortunately it got stained with some medicine or something," she continued, " and as it was really my fault I took it home to have it cleaned. I don't think the stain shows. I hope you don't mind."

" Of course not. It was awfully kind of you."

" She's a very lovely little lady. I feel jealous. Who is she ? Or is that an indiscreet question ? "

" Of course not," I said again, " but you needn't be jealous. She's not a bit like you. You're absolutely different."

" Is that a compliment, I wonder ? " The green eyes gleamed behind her black lashes ; then she laughed.

" Well, au revoir ; in half an hour ! "

The Rolls-Royce that came to fetch me was a very gorgeous affair. It was more

than a car, it was a young palace. It was upholstered in dull black, embroidered with scarlet silk flowers, and two scarlet and gold cushions were provided for the weary traveller's back. The lights were rose-shaded, and every little accessory was in ivory and gold.

Of course, the whole thing was preposterous, but it was so in keeping with the atmosphere that surrounded the entire household that it never even struck me as remarkable, or vulgar.

It only took us a few minutes to reach Ardgowan Lodge. As the footman opened the door, Olga came forward.

"You must go straight to bed," she said. "Greenwood will come and unpack for you. Your dinner will be brought upstairs."

My bedroom was furnished in mediæval style to correspond with the rough stone walls, which even up here were not hidden from view.

The effect was fascinating. One entire side of the room was hung with tapestry, and the electric light was so cleverly arranged that it filled the room with light, without any hideous lamps or accessories being visible. There was no furniture, except a large, rough writing-table and a couple of stools. The bed was a low couch with an enormous

rug of skins thrown over it. I looked at them casually and could hardly believe my eyes. They were picked Russian sable.

There was a tap at the door and Greenwood came in, as though he had never left me.

"I'm sorry to hear you've been so ill, sir," he said respectfully, "but glad to be able to serve you again, sir."

"Thank you," I answered.

I did not know how to answer this unexpected greeting.

"Things look a bit rough-and-ready in this room, so to speak," he went on, "but in the bathroom you will find every modern convenience. It's next door."

He led the way to a door a few steps down the passage and opened it. I gasped.

The whole place was panelled in pink marble. The bath was sunk in the floor and reached by a flight of steps. Every tap and handle was silver, and in the far corner stood two orange trees. Along one side of the wall, opposite the bath, was a shelf of pink marble. On this stood three large cut-glass bowls with rose-water, orange-water and verbenas. There were more than half a dozen glass bottles containing every known variety of bath salt.

"Well I'm damned!" I said.

"You should see Miss Englehardt's bathroom," Greenwood interrupted, "it's most amazing, sir—all black marble, a green bath, and the ceiling painted like the sky at night, with stars."

"This is quite palatial enough for me; give me the bath-towel."

"What bath salts would you prefer, sir?"

"Verbena," I said carelessly.

"Here is the soap to match them."

He put a large wooden bowl with a brush by the side of the bath, and threw in the salts before he left the room. The water foamed up like a miniature Niagara. I buried myself up to the chin, the soft scented water drawing the last vestige of fatigue out of my limbs.

I plunged into bed between the linen sheets—linen so fine that it felt more like lawn. The pillow was so encrusted with lace and embroidery that I looked at it ruefully, wondering where I should find room to put my nose without having it scratched. There was a knock at the door, and Olga entered with a large soft pillow in her arms.

"This is Black Magic," I said. "I'm like the princess in the fairy tale who had everything she wanted—but a crumpled rose-leaf spoilt her night's rest. The only thing I

hadn't got in this luxurious place was an ordinary pillow."

"I remembered that," she laughed. "This embroidery and elaboration isn't my choice, it's my uncle's. He loves things to look rich. I like gorgeous materials, and everything else very plain."

"Is that comfy?" She slid the pillow behind my back so that it caught me just in the right place, and pulled the sable rug across my knees.

"That's mine." She stroked the rug softly. "But I want you to have it for a few nights. You mustn't catch another chill."

"I think it's the most wonderful rug I've ever seen. It must be enormously valuable. I'm almost afraid to have it on my bed, the skins seem so alive. Every hair is full of vitality. Most skins lose that look very soon."

"That's because they drew vitality from me every night." Her voice was low and full. "Feel how the electricity runs through me." She laid her fingers lightly on my wrist. I could feel the little pricks of electric current as the fingers touched my skin. I shifted luxuriously in my bed. I was utterly at ease and the outside world seemed far away. Olga's charm and

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fascination held me more powerfully every minute.

Then my eyes fell upon Gyp's picture, which was standing on the oak table. Evidently Greenwood had put it there, while I was in my bath. Olga's eyes followed mine and she brought the frame to my bed. "You can just see the mark," she said, "but it hardly shows. I did the best I could."

"It's splendid, thanks awfully. It must have given you a lot of trouble."

"Not a bit. Oh yes, the photo's come unstuck a bit at the corners. It wants some seccotine. There's the dinner-gong. I must fly. I'll come up and see you later."

I looked at the photograph again.

You know when a tooth has ached badly, how surprised you are when you bite on it and it doesn't hurt. That is exactly how I felt when I looked at Gyp's picture. All the old feelings of hope and sadness and longing had disappeared. I only felt vaguely conscious that I was looking at the picture of a very pretty girl.

There was a slight wrinkle at the corner where the picture was not lying straight on the mount, and I took it out of the frame. I turned the corner back and it peeled away so easily that, before I knew what I was

doing, it had come right off. In the middle of the mount where the photo had been was a small square of writing—I should say rather, of letters and numbers.

I looked again. Then the explanation flashed across my brain. It was a cipher that Gyp used to communicate with me when she sent me a note about anything that she didn't want the hotel servants to read.

It was the most elementary of ciphers, but it had served many a useful purpose, although as a means of keeping an important message secret it would have been useless. Anyone with the smallest degree of knowledge could have deciphered it in a few minutes. I jumped out of bed and, unlocking my dispatch-box, took out the notebook where I had jotted down the key.

When Greenwood's steps re-echoed down the passage I put the whole concern away under my pillow and devoted myself with outward relish to my dinner; but the discovery had quite driven my appetite away, although caviare and peaches are not things to be neglected. "Miss Englehardt will be up in a few moments, she wished me to tell you," he said as he cleared away the tray.

I worked feverishly at the cipher.

In a few moments I was rewarded. This is how it ran :

O.E. is working for us. Help her ; don't hinder. Password is, " How high the hills are round here." She will answer, " And covered with snow."—" 3."

" Damn ! " I threw the piece of paper aside and stuffed the things under my bedclothes. So, as usual, I had been making a fool of myself, and no doubt Allan and Gyp had been laughing over my misplaced zeal. I felt pretty sick, but underneath it all I could not help a faint feeling of satisfaction. There was no longer any obstacle to my friendship with Olga. I was getting fed up with the whole business of spying. Insensibly, I was beginning to feel almost antagonistic towards Gyp. Why she put the mysterious " 3 " at the end of the cipher I could not imagine. As a rule she signed herself " G." But then everything was so mysterious nowadays.

" Was your dinner good ? "

Olga came in quietly, a shimmer of crimson and silver, a big black fox fur slung across her shoulders.

" Perfectly topping, thanks. I ate an enormous meal. It's getting quite cold." I pulled up the fur rug.

"It's a pretty Arctic spot at times. You get some icy winds sometimes."

"I'm not surprised," I said casually. "How high the hills are round here!"

"And covered with snow."

She looked utterly blank. Suddenly I burst out laughing.

"Then you are one of us?" I said joyously.

"However did you know?"

She gave a little sigh and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"It's such a relief to be able to speak out. Of course I didn't think you were a Bolshevik—but I never suspected you were anything else than an ordinary private individual and a friend of Gyp's."

"You know Gyp, then?"

She nodded.

"I've just met her, but I don't know her well. Do you?"

"Pretty well. I've come back from working with her in Algiers."

"Yes. I knew she was there. She's back in England, though, now?"

"Oh, yes. She's employed on the same job as the rest of us."

She laughed. "You're very cautious. You've been looking for that wretched paper. If anyone can nose it out, Gyp will. I

suppose it was she who let you know that I was one of the elect ? ”

“ Look ! Isn’t it jolly neat ? ” I showed her the message. “ But I might never have found it out if it hadn’t been for the accident to the frame.”

“ I’m afraid Gyp hasn’t trained you very well,” she said, laughing. “ You must always be on the look-out for messages either from your own side or to the enemy. I shall make a first-rate spy of you before I have finished.”

Her lovely eyes flickered with deep green lights, and I put out my hand and caught hers.

“ Teach me everything you know,” I whispered. “ You’re not human, Olga. You’re like some fascinating witch.”

“ ‘ Villia, O Villia, witch of the wood ’ ! ” she hummed ; “ shall I teach you how to love ? You might prove too apt a pupil ! ”

She laughed softly and came a little nearer.

My brain swam and my heart pounded against my ribs, but her mood changed suddenly.

“ We’ve got a lot of work to do,” she said ; “ you know all about Greenwood, don’t you ? ”

“ I thought *he* had the paper,” I said

helplessly. “ Gyp thought it was he who stole it from Frida Fergus.”

“ She came to an untimely end, didn’t she ? That was pretty smart work on Gyp’s part.” Olga’s eyes narrowed.

“ Don’t ! ” I shivered. “ It turns me sick to think of it even now. I liked Frida.”

“ She made the mistake of her life when she let herself get influenced by her love for Ivanovitch. Once you’re in this game, you’re in up to the hilt, and you’re sure to get ‘ done in ’ if you let your emotions run away with you. You’ve got to forget that you ever had any natural affections or feelings.”

“ I don’t believe *you’re* like that,” I said positively.

Again she looked at me with that weird light in her eyes.

“ What about your uncle ? ” I asked.

“ He’s just what he seems—a retired manufacturer. I think he’d pass away in a fit if he knew what my job in life was.”

“ When did you begin ? ”

“ Like a good many other people, on the outbreak of war. I worked in the Intelligence to begin with. When they found out that I was pretty useful at languages, they gave me some odd jobs to do, and gradually I drifted into the regular Service.”

"Then don't *you* think that Greenwood has the paper?"

"I don't know what to think. I fancy that he is trying to hunt a lone trail and get all the kudos for himself. If he has got it, he keeps it hidden somewhere very carefully. I've been through all his things half a dozen times."

"It's very little use without the essential factor."

"What is the formula for the essential factor?"

I shook my head. "Gyp was always very secretive about it, but I fancy it is something pretty complicated."

"You see, Greenwood is working for Hoffman, and he and Ivanovitch are deadly rivals. But it's quite possible that Greenwood thinks that he might do the whole job for himself."

"It was a stroke of luck that he came to you. We might have lost sight of him altogether."

Olga laughed. "Shall we say good management rather than good luck. I managed it very neatly."

"Do you think I shall be of any help to you? I have been rather like the man with the white gloves lately—always being too
ate."

“ Believe me,” Olga said earnestly, “ you will be the *greatest* help. Now I shall leave you to sleep.”

She pulled up the great fur rug over my shoulders.

“ Can you smell its scent ? ” she asked. “ It’s what I always use myself. Will you think of me ? ”

Then she pressed my shoulder with a little friendly gesture and was gone. Somehow I felt defrauded of something by that careless “ Good night.” I lay listening, hoping vaguely that she might return. But the house was wrapped in complete silence, and only the crackling of the flames broke the stillness.

I buried my face in the soft skins. The sweet, heavy odour made me think of plaits of dark-red hair and the pale gleam of white shoulders.

I lay half drowsing when the noise of a step on the ground outside made me start. I pulled back the curtain and peered out.

There he stood, his shadow black and clean-cut in the cold moonlight—Trotsky, the great baboon.

He stretched out his long arms as though he were thinking ; then he looked up at the window, and I swear that the brute grinned when he saw me !

I clicked the heavy catch in place, pulled the curtains and padded back to bed—but I felt happier when I heard a shuffling below which proclaimed that he had departed elsewhere.

I fell asleep. Although I never stirred, I was conscious of much movement and a sort of feverish activity which pervaded the whole house.

CHAPTER XVII

I LEARN THE TRUTH

GREENWOOD brought me my breakfast in bed. I looked at him curiously. It seemed extraordinary that behind his impassive, well-trained manner was hidden a nature capable of desiring nations and countries to be plunged into chaos and ruin.

“Not being sure of what you preferred, sir, the chef sent you bacon and eggs.”

He took off the cover with a flourish and displayed the usual morsel of congealing bacon that is the most a really high-class cook ever condescends to provide. The better the chef, the worse the breakfast. I believe that they think it is a meal only fit for barbarians, and not one that any artist in the culinary line could stoop to prepare.

“These French can’t cook an egg for breakfast, sir, and the toast’s like leather.”

Greenwood’s voice was full of scorn.

"English ways are best, you think?" I watched him narrowly, but his face never changed.

"Rather, sir! I was very pleased to get back to England, though I was sorry to leave you in that outlandish place. How is Miss Kiknadze, if I may take the liberty of asking?"

"Oh, very well," I said casually.

"No engagement yet, sir?"

"Engagement? How do you mean?"

"Her and Mr. Hancock, sir. It is pretty plain that they were courting."

For a moment I felt unreasonably annoyed, then it passed, and I laughed. Somehow I didn't seem to mind any more. It used to awake a fierce pang of jealousy when I heard Gyp and Hancock's names coupled. But now I felt as though long ago I had cared frightfully for someone, and that they had died, and that all trace of feeling had left my heart. "'Heartily know when half-gods go the gods arrive,'" I murmured to myself. "Oh, so you think they are going to get married?"

I am not in the habit of gossiping with servants, but I was faintly curious.

"Well, they ought to, sir."

For a moment I looked at him blankly, not understanding his meaning, then it

suddenly dawned upon me. I suppose he saw from the expression on my face that I was furious.

"No offence meant, sir," he whined, "but you asked my meaning, so to speak, and I hated seeing you taken in like."

"When I need you to look after my affairs I will inform you," I said coldly. "You can go now."

He disappeared with remarkable speed, leaving me to my thoughts. I was feeling pretty sick. Gyp and Hancock had succeeded in making a fool of me, a thing which is never very agreeable. I had honestly believed Gyp when she said that she never mixed business and pleasure. When I thought of how she must have laughed at my proposal, coming as it did in the middle of her affair with Allan, I swore whole-heartedly.

The game was the game, I reflected, and I must play it to the best of my ability, but I would take care, if this business were brought to a successful conclusion, that Gyp learned my real opinion of her little ways.

I dressed leisurely. Greenwood did not appear again. I think he had had a pretty good fright.

I wondered if Olga were up. I was looking forward to spending a long day with her, with nothing and no one to interrupt us.

If between us we could manage to make Greenwood produce the paper, or else find it for ourselves, we should have accomplished a pretty smart piece of work and, I chuckled to myself, have also fairly cut out Gyp and Allan.

I wandered downstairs into the sitting-room, where we had had tea the first night. There was an enormous fire burning in the open grate; the daily paper lay upon the table, and a large box of cigarettes stood invitingly open, but there was no sign of Olga. I lit a cigarette, half smoked it, then threw it away. I picked up *The Times* and began to read the leading article, but it seemed to have no point, and I put it down with a yawn. There was a soft footstep behind me, and I swung round, expecting to see Olga, but it was only Mr. Grant, his blue eyes blinking behind his glasses. I was so disappointed I could barely be polite; he extended a large, well-manicured hand and pressed mine warmly.

"I hope everything is as you like it?" he inquired genially.

I assured him that I had all I wanted, then I could stand it no longer.

"Where is Miss Englehardt?" I asked.

"I believe she has gone for a walk," he

said. "She is a strange girl in some ways, my niece, and one of her many little idiosyncrasies is to take long walks among the hills. She is away all day sometimes. But you and I will manage to entertain each other." He drew up a large arm-chair to the fire, and settled himself comfortably in its depths.

I fidgeted around for a time, then I followed his example, and picked up a book, but I could not remain quiet for more than two minutes. My skin was prickling all over with electricity. Gradually the same feeling of restless longing that I had experienced some days before came over me, and I shut my book abruptly.

"I think I shall go and meet Miss Englehardt. Do you know which way she has gone?"

Mr. Grant looked at me absentmindedly, then his glance focused. I felt a curious twinge of memory. Somewhere—where I could not imagine—I had seen him before. I could not even be certain that I had seen him, but there was something about him which reminded me forcibly of some bygone experience. I tried to put a name to it, but it eluded me, and I was conscious of a vague feeling of discomfort. Then it passed, as a mist floats momentarily in front of one's eyes and is gone.

"I believe she went up the Glen, but I'm not sure," he said. "Do you think it is wise for you to venture out?"

"Oh, I must have fresh air."

I was so impatient to be gone that I hardly waited to answer him. Indeed I was walking rapidly down the drive before I was really conscious of having left the house.

The rapid motion dispelled for a few moments the feeling of aching, unutterable longing for Olga which overwhelmed me, but as I turned up the Glen and saw no sign of her, I began to run, with stumbling step and panting breath.

"Olga, Olga," I called desperately, but the cold grey distance gave back the echo of my voice, and there was no reply.

I turned back wearily. It was senseless to wander up the Glen over a road which was nearly impassable, owing to the drifts, yet I felt as though I must push on, in a wild endeavour to find her. It seemed as though my whole body were parched and aching for want of a long draught of cold water.

I turned in at the lodge gates; as I did so, Olga came out of the lodge itself.

"Olga!" I was almost sobbing with relief, "I've been looking for you everywhere."

She came towards me and took me by the arm.

“ You’re tired,” she said gently. “ Deryk, how foolish you are. Will you never learn to take care of yourself—not even for my sake ? ” She spoke so softly that I could scarcely hear, but my heart was thumping against my ribs with pure joy.

We passed through the front door, and up the stone stairs, but at the top she paused.

“ Will you come to my own sitting-room ? ” she said, and we went down the passage to a room where the bow window looked sheerly down the side of a steep cliff into the waters of a dark river, now partially frozen over.

I had never been in the room before, and I looked round with interest.

The walls were panelled in oak, and the parquet floor was covered with great skins, some of them of extraordinary value. Heavy crimson brocade curtains hung at the window, the deep arm-chairs were covered in gold, and each one had a large soft rug flung across it.

“ Do you like it ? ” she asked.

“ It reminds me of you,” I said slowly, “ all richness and fur.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“ I must have warmth and softness.”

She sat down in front of the fire and curled herself sinuously into the glossy black skin, that seemed to mould itself to her form.

The great logs crackled and sparkled with a blue and green flame, and I began to feel drowsy, but her next words made me start.

"I have found the paper."

I stared at her unbelievably, hardly crediting my senses.

"Found the paper?"

"Shsh," she glanced round the room quickly, "I found it to-day—this morning—in Greenwood's room."

"Then we've won—they're beaten—their game's up!"

I spoke breathlessly, but she shook her head.

"Are you going to let Gyp know?" I suggested.

"And let her take the credit of the whole thing!" Her voice shook with passion, and I looked at her in amazement.

"Gyp wouldn't do that," I said eagerly, "she's absolutely straight. And it would save time."

"Are you *sure* you don't know the formula of the essential factor. Try and think?"

"Me?" I looked at her blankly. Her eyes were narrowed, and her face was deathly white.

" I don't know it," I stammered uneasily. There was something sinister in the atmosphere that I didn't understand.

" Supposing that if you knew it—I was the reward ? "

" You ? "

" To hold in your arms—to possess utterly and entirely." Her voice was sweet and husky, and yet—I shook from top to toe.

" I don't know it," I repeated vacantly.

" Then we must help your memory. Does that remind you of anything ? " She pointed towards the wall on my right, and involuntarily my glance followed the direction of her finger.

My eyes were caught and held by a most horrible phenomena. Through one of the oak panels I could distinguish a pair of eyes glaring at me. The blue malignancy of their gaze made my very soul shiver, and dimly, slowly, out of the past some horrible recollection seemed striving to materialise.

I tried to look away, but in vain. Those eyes held mine as though riveted by chains of steel.

" Now can you remember anything ? "

" I swear to you I know nothing," I said desperately. " Why can't you send it to Gyp ? "

Olga laughed, and the sound made me shiver.

"If Gyp were here," she said smoothly, "I think that even she would prove quite tractable, but I am afraid that possibly she might not see the point of coming up here at my request. Besides, it is obvious that you know all we require. It is not likely that, having been your mistress, she did not tell you either where she kept the formula or what it contains."

I tried to look round, but those cursed eyes still prevented me.

"Who are you?" I gasped.

She laughed again.

"Not what you thought, at any rate. But come along, we're wasting time. You'd better make up your mind to tell me all you know."

"I can't," I groaned.

"Not even to help me?" Her voice was low and thrilling and, Heaven forgive me, could I have divulged what she wished me to, I would have done so.

"Olga," I said desperately, "I love you, I worship you. I would do anything for you, but I can't achieve the impossible. I don't know the formula."

All the time those eyes were searing mine like blue flames, and I was powerless to move.

“ I don't know it,” I stammered uneasily. There was something sinister in the atmosphere that I didn't understand.

“ Supposing that if you knew it—I was the reward ? ”

“ You ? ”

“ To hold in your arms—to possess utterly and entirely.” Her voice was sweet and husky, and yet—I shook from top to toe.

“ I don't know it,” I repeated vacantly.

“ Then we must help your memory. Does that remind you of anything ? ” She pointed towards the wall on my right, and involuntarily my glance followed the direction of her finger.

My eyes were caught and held by a most horrible phenomena. Through one of the oak panels I could distinguish a pair of eyes glaring at me. The blue malignancy of their gaze made my very soul shiver, and dimly, slowly, out of the past some horrible recollection seemed striving to materialise.

I tried to look away, but in vain. Those eyes held mine as though riveted by chains of steel.

“ Now can you remember anything ? ”

“ I swear to you I know nothing,” I said desperately. “ Why can't you send it to Gyp ? ”

Olga laughed, and the sound made me shiver.

"If Gyp were here," she said smoothly, "I think that even she would prove quite tractable, but I am afraid that possibly she might not see the point of coming up here at my request. Besides, it is obvious that you know all we require. It is not likely that, having been your mistress, she did not tell you either where she kept the formula or what it contains."

I tried to look round, but those cursed eyes still prevented me.

"Who are you?" I gasped.

She laughed again.

"Not what you thought, at any rate. But come along, we're wasting time. You'd better make up your mind to tell me all you know."

"I can't," I groaned.

"Not even to help me?" Her voice was low and thrilling and, Heaven forgive me, could I have divulged what she wished me to, I would have done so.

"Olga," I said desperately, "I love you, I worship you. I would do anything for you, but I can't achieve the impossible. I don't know the formula."

All the time those eyes were searing mine like blue flames, and I was powerless to move.

"Nonsense," she said incredulously, "you must know. Greenwood swears you do."

"Greenwood's a liar," I said furiously, "like all of you. You've lied to me, you've trapped me."

"More fool you," she laughed softly, "but now—for the last time—will you answer my question?"

I only shook my head. Next moment I was gagged. I felt my arms pinioned, and I was lifted off my feet. I fought madly, and once I felt my foot come in contact with something soft. Then I felt a blow on the head, and darkness rushed to meet me.

When I opened my eyes, I was lying on a couch in a small square room. It was nearly dark, and what light there was filtered through a window set high above my head. The walls were of bare stone. It was bitterly cold, and when I first awoke, not knowing where I was, I put out my hand to draw up the blankets. Slowly my brain began to work again. I cursed myself for a fool at having been taken in by Olga and the man she called "Uncle," and yet I was not entirely to blame. What did the mysterious message from Gyp mean?

I shut my eyes and tried not to think, and all the time my longing for Olga grew and grew, till the pain of my desire blotted out

the pain in my head. Every other feeling seemed to have left me. Nothing mattered but my overwhelming need of her. And then suddenly she stood before me. Beautiful and alluring, her beech-leaf hair curling from beneath her close gold cap, and her gown all a-shimmer with light and sparkle.

She came in softly, with a small lamp in her hand and a large rug over her arm.

"Is your head hurting?" she said gently.

I nearly laughed, it was so ludicrous. She might have been genuinely concerned over my welfare, instead of, presumably, being delighted at my predicament. But, try as I might, I could feel no anger against her. The moment that she came into the room all my unrest and feverishness disappeared, and I felt as though I had been plunged into the waters of Lethe.

"I'm not feeling my best," I said grimly, "but I don't suppose that fact will upset your appetite for dinner." I was determined to fight against her extraordinary fascination as much as lay in my power. She came across to the couch and laid her hands upon my forehead. As if by magic, the throbbing and the pain ceased and I felt gloriously sleepy.

"Why will you be so obstinate?" she

whispered, "if only you would be reasonable, we could be so happy. Once this cursed affair is finished I will work no more, and we will go away together—far away from this cold and gloom to where the seas sparkle all day in the hot sun, and at nights the only sound is of the surf breaking upon the coral reefs, and the beating of our two hearts beneath the stars."

I stretched out my hands blindly, but she put them gently aside, and her voice hardened. "But make no mistake, the Cause comes first, and I mean to win. And if you will not help of your own free will—there are other ways."

I shut my eyes involuntarily at the sight of her face. It was evil personified, and my heart sank within me.

"I swear to you," I said hoarsely, "that I know nothing," but she shook her head.

"No. 3 plays a lone hand, but we know she has told you where she keeps the missing formula."

"No. 3?" I said.

"Gyp," she retorted impatiently. "I suppose you don't know her by that name. She's got three letters in her name, so she's No. 3. And that's why you had a 3 branded on your hand, and probably by now Hancock has got one too. It's useful to know any

member of the pack for certain. '3' must be getting nervy. She used to run her show alone."

"Then you knew all the time?"

"From the moment I saw you in the street," she said coolly. "Before that I wanted to get hold of you, so I brought Greenwood up here. I must say you fell into the trap more easily than I had expected. It never seemed to strike you that, if he wished, he could have covered up his tracks so that neither you nor anyone else could have found him."

I writhed inwardly but I said nothing.

"Won't you be reasonable?" Her voice suddenly lost its hardness and, as of old, it thrilled me. I believe I would have betrayed my trust had it been within my power.

"I can't tell you what I don't know," I said monotonously.

Her mouth hardened.

"Then take the consequences."

She gave a low whistle, and the door flew open. A pair of horrible figures entered. One was wrapped in white from head to foot, save for two slits, through which glared those steely blue eyes that I had seen twice before in my life. Once that very morning, and once—in the underground room at Marseilles.

By the hand the figure led the large baboon which I had seen in the hut in the clearing, and my flesh shrank at the sight of his hairy loathsomeness.

The door closed behind them softly, and the flame flickered in the little lamp.

CHAPTER XVIII

GYP TO THE RESCUE

I LAY and looked at them without speaking. As I could not tell them what they wanted to know (and I thanked Heaven I couldn't) it seemed useless to talk. But I was pretty confident that I was not going to enjoy myself. However, I reflected, it was no use going to meet trouble before it met me, so I asked for a cigarette.

The figure in white never moved, but Olga gave a little gasp.

"Do you think you are here to enjoy yourself?" she said breathlessly, but she handed me her cigarette case nevertheless. It was one I had always admired, barbaric and bizarre, but quite unique. It was made of rough silver, closely studded with turquoise and diamonds.

"I don't like these," I said coolly, "haven't you got a Balkan?"

She laughed, but it was not a nice sound, and I felt an unpleasant chilly sensation down my spine.

"Smoke by all means while you can still taste them," and she gave me the brand I asked for.

I felt as though I were watching the preparations for a big operation, but interesting though they might be from a detached point of view, the thought that I was to be the victim detracted from my pleasure.

Trotsky had evidently forgotten that he had been introduced to me. He looked at me out of his evil eyes and made strange unpleasant noises. He was tied by his chain to the handle of the door, but I must confess that the very sight of him filled me with horrible apprehension. He was too uncanny and too unnatural to be regarded with equanimity, and I wondered for what purpose they had brought him.

However it was useless looking gloomy before even the overture to the play had begun, so I puffed away quietly at my cigarette, and I flatter myself that I succeeded in preserving a fairly calm exterior.

I saw Olga glance at me once or twice in a puzzled sort of way, and I felt a momentary flash of triumph, but I dared not let my thoughts dwell on her for long. She was too desirable. I knew that with her uncanny power she had probed depths in my nature of which even I myself was barely aware.

The figure in white remained motionless beside the baboon. Indeed he might have been a statue. Even his breathing seemed suspended, and the slits through which his eyes looked were blank—it was like looking into the sockets of a skull. His very immobility began to get on my nerves, and I felt that if he did not soon move, I should be compelled to go and touch him to see if he were flesh and blood, and yet I shuddered at the bare thought of moving any nearer.

The silence in that little room was tangible. No one moved. Olga sat, with her hands folded, beside a small table, on which stood a basin and a bottle containing some colourless liquid. Even the great baboon was absolutely motionless ; not a sound from outside broke the silence. Suddenly my nerves cracked, and I began to sing, but the notes sounded so strange and gruesome, that I stopped short in horror. It was as though a stone had been taken and dropped into space. There were eddies and whirls in that horrible silence, and nothing else.

Then I addressed those three motionless figures, and implored them to answer me, but not a word came in reply. In a frenzy I tried to jump from the couch, but, suddenly, I found that those sockets were no longer

blank, and the blue glare of the half-seen eyes chained me to my place.

I gibbered and moaned, but my cries only made the silence seem more horrible, and at last I was silent.

Then Olga came to my side, and I clung to her in desperation, as a child would cling to its mother. *Mumuki*

“ Why won’t you be sensible, Deryk ? ” she pleaded. “ I love you so—don’t you care for me more than for that woman, who loves another man ? Why do you make us both miserable. Won’t you help me ? ” She held out her white arms from which the sleeves fell away softly, showing their perfect lines, but I could only shake my head.

“ If you care for me,” I said, “ you wouldn’t ask me to betray my trust—but I tell you again . . . ” then I broke down, the need and the longing for her were so great.

She came a little nearer, and I saw her wonderful eyes gazing into mine, just as once before they had gazed in the train. The same sensation came over me, but this time I knew I was being mesmerised only and no drug was being used. But so completely was I under her spell, that I rejoiced, as a drug maniac must rejoice when he sees the drug he craves for.

I sank deeper and deeper into a dream-like

ecstasy, yet I was conscious that Olga was still near me. I put out my hands gropingly, and she took them in her own. She held me closely and I passed my hand up her perfect neck, and felt the beating of a pulse in her soft throat. All sense seemed merged in a vast nothingness. Yet all the time I was dimly aware of her encircling arms. Slowly, very slowly, I struggled back to consciousness. I fought against it, for I wanted to remain forever in that blissful Nirvana. But gradually I returned ; just as it is when emerging from chloroform, so it was with me.

My physical senses registered salient points, which my mind refused to grasp. I was conscious of a vague feeling of roughness beneath my fingers, but at first it meant nothing to me, then gradually the sensation became more definite, and I felt as though I had hold of something hairy.

Reluctantly I opened my eyes. The mists of unconsciousness rolled away, and I returned to a world of horror. Within an inch of mine was the face of the loathsome baboon ; I could feel his hot, fetid breath. My hands were entwined in his coat, and I was half lying, half sitting in his arms.

Almost before I had time to grasp the horrible detail, Olga had pulled the beast

away, and led him across the room to where the white figure still stood motionless.

Then she came back to me, where I lay shaking from head to foot.

"Trotsky is just as pleasant to embrace and fondle as I should be?" she said questioningly. "You never knew the difference."

"And you could stand by and see such a thing," I gasped. "Are you a devil, or are you bewitched?"

She laughed coolly.

"Don't you realise how much you are in my power?" she said. "You thought you were holding me in your arms, and it was our friend Trotsky. I assure you, you made love to him very nicely. I felt quite jealous, but it was so amusing, that I fought down my personal feelings."

"I wish he had killed me."

"Oh, he's well under control—just like you. Sit up and pray, my pet."

The brute lumbered into a sitting position, and folded its hairy paws in mock prayer.

"Pretty sight," she turned to me with her eyes half closed, and her red lips drawn back from her teeth in a sneer.

"Would you like another kiss from his rosebud mouth?"

"Olga, for God's sake, stop torturing me."

I sat up and tried to seize her hand, but she drew away out of my reach.

"Torturing you!" she said contemptuously, "what do you know about torture? Wait till we have won, and the world is at our feet, praying for mercy. Wait till the Red Armies trample with bloody feet over a world which knows no power but theirs."

"Germany thought that once," I said.

"Germany!" she snapped her fingers. "She talked 'frightfulness' but she was soft and afraid when it came to deeds, like all your Western civilisation. But Germany is an apt pupil, and she will learn from us—and then . . .!"

She turned on her heels, and left her sentence unfinished.

"And you think, that even if it lay within my power to help you, I would raise a finger to bring about a result, which would plunge the world into such a chaos of horror, that Nero himself would have revolted at the thought?"

"Think! Think!" she mimicked me bitterly. "I don't waste time in thinking, I act."

She crossed the room, and before I could move, she and the white-robed figure were binding me to the couch with ropes. They stripped me to the waist. I did not even

struggle. What was the use? I was powerless to escape them within the narrow limits of that room. I shut my eyes, and tried to make my mind a blank. I heard them moving about, I felt them put something wet on my breast, and I heard the buzz of an electric motor. Then suddenly, the nerves of my chest began to twitch, and an intolerable itching broke out all over me.

At first it affected my entire body; it felt as though thousands of minute insects were crawling about me. Then the sensation centralised itself, until only one small portion was affected. But to describe the misery of the feeling is impossible. Imagine ten thousand tiny ants crawling lightly, yet incessantly, over one place, till the surface was irritated into a state of burning and itching. I tried to raise my head, but they had passed a cord, lightly yet firmly, round my neck.

At first I endeavoured to distract myself by counting the flowers in the plaster wreaths upon the ceiling, but the maddening itching prevented me from fixing my mind upon anything. I writhed in the grip of the ropes; I felt that if only for one blessed moment I could tear my hand free, I would lacerate the itching flesh till it was too sore to torment me any longer.

But the rope held firm, and the torture increased momentarily till my brain began to whirl, and the world seemed one huge, inflamed, itching circle. My mouth grew dry, and my tongue swelled. I babbled incoherently, and all the time Olga stood by with mocking eyes and smiling lips.

At last, just as the limit of my utmost endurance had been reached—the torture ceased. For a few moments I lay in silent relief, the perspiration pouring off my forehead, then I raised my eyes and looked at Olga.

She returned the look calmly and even smiled.

“Do you feel more like telling me anything now?”

I shook my head.

“I ought to hate you,” I said slowly, “and in a way I do, and yet there’s part of me which can’t hate you. I feel as though long ago, down the ages, you and I had already met, and been something more than acquaintances.”

“When I was a King in Babylon, and you were a Christian slave,” she quoted, and for a moment all the cruelty and the evil left her face, and she looked as young and as beautiful as ever. “Perhaps, who knows?” she said softly, “and if once it has been,

it will be again. The eternal order of things never changes, only the cycle of events moves onwards."

She stood almost as though dreaming, and I looked at her longingly. But it was only for a moment; then she turned towards me with all the softness gone from her face.

"And now?" she questioned, but I did not answer and lay still.

For a while I thought she was going mad. All the savage, passionate blood in her veins ran riot, and she licked me with the whip of her tongue. Then the baboon, who was crouching behind her, coughed, and she turned on him savagely and beat him till the wretched beast lay moaning, warding off the blows with half-human hands. Why he, who could have torn her in two as easily as I could tear a piece of paper, did not turn on her passes my comprehension. I think he was half mesmerised, but she was so utterly fearless that she could cow the most savage nature. At last she flung the whip into the corner, and throwing herself panting into a chair, she sat without speaking, her eyes fixed upon the floor.

"Here," she said presently, beckoning the white figure.

It moved slowly across the room and stood beside her. She motioned towards me, and

it bent over me, its blue eyes glaring into mine, as they had done once before in that underground room in Marseilles.

After that I was conscious of nothing but a confused jumble of happenings and sensations. I knew that I was past caring, almost past feeling. They loosened the rope which bound me and sat me at a table.

Greenwood came, and laid in front of me a document which, dazed as I was, I knew to be the missing paper.

"Add the essential factor," Olga whispered in my ear. And still those ghastly eyes on the opposite side of the table stared into mine, demanding the same answer.

I gazed hopelessly at the figures and numbers in front of me, and my mind began mechanically to try and make some sense out of the confusion.

Then everything went blank, and in spite of the compelling force which would have held them open, Nature had her way, and for a few blissful moments I fell asleep.

But only for a short space; I awoke to a burning pain, and felt Olga holding a lighted match between my fingers.

"You're not here for your health's sake," she said calmly. "Answer my question."

The sweat ran down my face as the flame scorched and sizzled, but I was determined

that sheer physical pain should not make me cry out. I was powerless against their hypnotic arts and their electrical devices, but I was not going to give way at the first touch of pain. I clenched my teeth and shut my eyes, till the whole of my hand seemed as though it were on fire, then I suppose I fainted.

" We'll come back later," I heard Olga say as I struggled back painfully to consciousness. " Let him be for a bit ; I'm played out. I must rest if I'm to do any more. Fasten him firmly in the chair, and leave the paper on the table. Perhaps his memory may suddenly return."

I felt the ropes drawn together, and then a drenching shower of cold water brought me to my senses.

" That'll keep your brain cool," Olga said pleasantly, and Greenwood thrust his face into mine.

" Your shaving water—SIR," he mimicked, and then added coarsely: " What price Gyp now ? Don't you wish she was 'ere ? "

I heard Trotsky grunt as he was led away. The light went out ; the door shut softly, and I was alone, shivering with cold and wet, the moonlight shining palely upon the table and turning the fateful paper into silver.

At first I was only conscious of such intense relief at being alone that nothing else mattered, then the cold of my soaking clothes, aggravated by the bitter wind blowing in through the narrow window, made me realise the hopelessness of my position. My burnt fingers ached intolerably.

There was nothing to do but to sit and think, and that was an occupation which led nowhere, except to the conclusion that I had been a fool, a fact which I knew already.

But what made matters worse was that I had been successful in tracking the paper, and yet here I was within two feet of it, and as powerless either to destroy it or to spirit it away to Gyp as if it had not been in the room.

From where I sat I could plainly see the grouping of the numerals and signs. I almost laughed as I thought how mistaken they were in believing that I possessed the key to the cipher. It was really quite humorous when I looked at it from that point of view. I suppose the long strain had told upon my nerves; anyhow, I sat and shook with silent laughter as I thought of how they would find themselves as ignorant at the end of my tortures as they were at the beginning.

I was so pleased with this thought that I forgot all my pain and discomfort, and laughed away to myself, till a sudden sound behind me made me start.

My back was to the window, and I was too tightly bound to turn my head. But I could distinctly hear a noise, and it seemed to me that it came from the direction of the window.

What new horror, I wondered, were they preparing for me? That they had not finished with me I knew well enough. Olga was determined to find out what she firmly believed I knew.

I set my teeth and waited. At least I could hold my tongue a little longer, and when pain forced me to speak I could but lie. The sound grew louder, then I heard a step behind me. I felt a hand upon my shoulder, but in spite of all my resolutions I gave an involuntary cry.

"Steady on, old thing," a voice whispered, and a moment later the rope fell from my hands.

I hardly dared look round; I knew I must be dreaming.

"Can you stand?"

A pair of warm, capable hands pulled me to my feet, and turning I looked straight into Gyp's grey eyes.

"Come on," she whispered, "put the table under the window."

She laid her hand on it, and then for the first time she saw the paper. She gave one glance, then snatched it up and put it inside the front of her dress.

"Good for you," she said under her breath. "You've won all along the line. Come away quickly."

But suddenly a great weariness seemed to overcome me, and I shook my head.

"You've got what we've all been looking for," I said; "take the paper and go back to Hancock. I shall stay here."

The grey eyes blazed, and she shook me by the shoulder.

"I suppose Olga has bewitched you," she said softly, "that you've no will left. You idiot! Do you imagine that what you've endured up to now would be anything but a joke to what she would make you suffer if she came back and found you here and that paper gone?"

"I don't care," I said wearily. And somehow I felt as though I had no energy, and all I wanted was to be left alone—to whatever fate might bring.

But Gyp put her arms round me, and the pressure seemed to melt the misery and hopelessness in my heart.

She pushed the table against the wall, and jumped up. With a slight squeeze she went through the window.

I dragged myself heavily after her.

"Once you're through," she whispered, bending down, "hang on to the ivy. It's very thick. When you reach the ground, keep in the shadow till you reach the trees. I'll be the other side of them."

She disappeared noiselessly.

It was no easy task forcing my way through that narrow slit. Half-way I stuck, and for a moment I felt as though the breath were being squeezed out of me. But I made a violent effort, and just managed to haul myself, panting and breathless, through the narrow aperture.

The descent by the ivy stem would have been easy enough except for my hands. The flame had burnt and blistered them to such an extent that they had swelled up to twice their size. The first moment was such agony that I almost dropped, and I turned sick and giddy with pain.

For a few seconds as I hung on, with every nerve throbbing, I felt inclined to let go and end the whole thing. After all, the paper was safe, and what happened to me mattered to nobody. Then a line which I had once read flashed through my brain:

"It isn't life that matters, but the courage that you bring to it." I gritted my teeth, and hand over hand I went down the face of the wall.

My head swam, every hand-clasp was mortal agony, but somehow I did it, and when I reached the ground I almost crawled along in the shadow till I came to the belt of the trees.

Once inside them, I began to breathe again. I crept through them noiselessly, and just beyond I could dimly see the outline of a big open car.

But as I reached the fringe of the trees I heard behind me a sudden clamour and the noise of the front door opening. Then I heard Olga's voice and the rattle of a chain, and I knew that Trotsky was loose.

For a moment fear paralysed me, then I started to run.

"I'm here." It was Gyp's voice.
"Quick, we can just do it."

My breath came in great gasps. Behind me I heard the baboon's lumbering feet, and in imagination I could feel his hairy paws round my throat.

I made a last effort, and fell into the seat beside Gyp. She pressed the self-starter with her foot, but the big car remained unresponsive.

"The engine's cold," she muttered, and I could see that her face was quite white.

Through the edge of the trees I saw Trotsky. His little eyes were gleaming red, and his long arms swung grotesquely from side to side.

"Take this." Gyp thrust a Colt into my hands and, pulling out the paper from her frock, lit a match. It burnt steadily in the cold air. Only a few short strides separated the baboon from the car, and behind him I saw Olga and by her side her "Uncle," the white robe slipping from him as he ran.

"You'd better fire now."

Her voice was quite calm, but my hand was shaking, and the first shot went wide.

Trotsky lunged forward, and I fired again almost in his face. He gave a choking scream, and flinging up his arms, fell back. At that moment there was another report, and I heard Gyp gasp. Then suddenly the car beneath our feet leaped to life, and vibrated to the steady purr of a powerful engine. I looked round. Gyp's left arm hung down by her side, but she slipped in the gear, and almost imperceptibly the car glided forward.

But the man had sprung forward, and leapt on to the footboard, dragging the Colt from my hand. He lifted his revolver and

pulled the trigger. There was no explosion, only an empty click.

The car gathered speed, and we flashed down the snowy drive into the darkness. Right ahead of us loomed the big gates, and as we brushed through them, the man on the footboard lost his balance, and fell backwards.

I heard the gears click into top, and we faded into the wintry night.

CHAPTER XIX

WE RACE DEATH

FOR a few minutes there was silence. The icy wind rushed past our ears, and the snowy landscape flashed by like a cinema film.

"Let me take the wheel," I said as well as my chattering teeth would let me. But Gyp shook her head.

"I can manage," she said briefly. "I don't want to lose a minute."

The car tore on. Occasionally the back wheels lost their grip in the frozen snow, and the engine raced madly.

"Will they follow us?"

Gyp nodded.

"I'm not going much farther," she said, "we might as well be killed by Olga and that crowd as die of pneumonia. But we're not going to do either," she added, and her mouth hardened.

"Is your arm broken?"

"I don't think so. It's just a shot

through the fleshy part," but as she spoke she swayed in her seat.

"Perhaps you'd better take the wheel," she said weakly, and I grabbed the steering wheel, just as she slipped back against the cushion, all the colour drained from her face.

I slid the gear into neutral, and bent over her anxiously, but she opened her eyes and managed to smile.

"I'm all right, really," she whispered, "but we mustn't stay here"; then she seemed to collapse again.

I took the wheel mechanically and drove on. All feeling had left my body and it was only the chattering of my teeth which made me realise that I was a living being, and not a brain in a piece of frozen flesh. But curiously enough I was able to think very clearly, and the situation did not tend to make me more cheerful.

Here we were, the pair of us, miles from help, in an open car, and pursued by one of the most relentless wills I had ever known. It seemed madness to continue, and I half slowed down.

"Go on," Gyp muttered.

"But what's the use," I expostulated, "where are we making for?"

She drew a long breath and sat up.

"*Anywhere*, so long as they don't catch up with us," she said.

"But why not go to the police, and tell them the whole story? We've got the paper at last, and there's no need for any more secrecy."

"You're like every other Englishman," Gyp said in a tone of exasperation, "you seem to think the police possess occult powers. Don't you suppose that by now Olga has telephoned to every police station within miles, telling them to look out for a stolen Mercedes car?"

"Oh," I said blankly, "it's not yours?"

"No! it's your friend Olga's. It was standing in the yard. I suppose the chauffeur had gone in to get his tea or something. The moment I heard a noise inside the house, I guessed what had happened, and jumped in to try and start up the engine. All I can say is that it was the biggest bit of luck I've ever had, and I've had some pretty close shaves, getting away as we did. We shouldn't have had much chance with the baboon."

She bit her lip.

"I don't mind much, but I do prefer to meet my death at the hands of human beings—if you can call Olga human."

"Where's Allan?" I asked.

"I left him in London."

"Well, it won't be long now, before we can give the damn' thing to Campbell," I said cheerfully.

She looked at me oddly.

"You're very sanguine, Deryk. I don't suppose we've ever been nearer death than we are at present. Still, the paper can never fall into their hands again. I'll see to that all right. But I would have liked to have finished up the job neatly."

She gave a little sigh, and I noticed how white her face looked.

I was just going to speak when away in the distance, but sounding clearly in the frosty air, came the unmistakable purr of a motor engine. Gyp slipped into the seat beside me.

"That's them," she said briefly and ungrammatically. "Drive as hard as you dare, Deryk."

The car shot forward under the impetus of the self-starter and Gyp dragged a rug out of the back and draped it round my shoulders.

"No need to get pneumonia before it's absolutely necessary," she said, and I snuggled thankfully down in the warm fur, although nothing could keep out the knife-like edge of the wind.

" Shall we follow the road straight on ? "

I asked.

Gyp nodded.

" There's nothing else to be done ; these roads up the glen go straight for miles. Directly we come to any sort of a track we'll chance it and turn off."

I drove as fast as I dared, but the road was winding, and I dared not risk a crash. It seemed to me as though I had been driving for years, in the clutches of a nightmare, when I felt the engine weaken and choke. I opened the throttle wider, but there was no response, and a moment later the car came to a standstill.

Gyp was standing up, looking back.

" Petrol tank empty," she said laconically, " they're about a mile behind. Let's run for it."

We sprang out, and plunged painfully up a steep hill, at the side of the road. The snow had drifted, and our progress was slow. I slipped, fell, and got up again ; and beside me, Gyp, one arm hanging uselessly, panted on, her breath coming in short gasps.

As we reached the top of the hill, and entered a small wood we saw the dazzling headlights of the Rolls-Royce flash round the corner. Then came the grinding of brakes as they saw the other car and stopped.

"And now," Gyp said, below her breath, "we start thinking. They'll see our tracks in the snow and follow us, and I can't run another hundred yards. How many rounds left in the revolver, Deryk?"

I peered up the slit in the grip.

"You must have put in a half-empty clip," I said slowly, "there's only one left."

"I know; I believe I did; I was in a hurry."

She did not speak for a minute, then she said:

"Promise me something?"

"I promise."

"If they get—us—you must shoot—me. I shall swallow the paper, and they'll look in vain."

"Oh, Gyp!" My voice shook. "I can't let you go alone like that."

She laid her hand on my arm.

"You won't have long to wait; if I were braver I should let you take the paper, and I should shoot. But I seem to have come to the end of my courage, and I can't trust myself any longer."

Below, in the road, we could hear the sound of their voices raised in discussion, and then a shout.

"They've found our tracks," Gyp said; "keep the revolver ready, Deryk, and follow me. We may do it yet."

She led the way at a quick run down the other side of the hill for a few yards, till we came to a small tangle of brushwood. Right into this she went, then she turned in her tracks, and tiptoed lightly back, only just putting the point of her toe into the heel-mark of each footprint. I followed her example as well as I could, and in less than two minutes we were back in the copse.

“ Keep quite quiet,” she whispered, and we crouched low in the undergrowth. Our pursuers had not yet reached the top of the hill. They were following our tracks, but they were hampered by their heavy fur coats.

I heard the man swear, as he slipped into a drift, but Olga never spoke. Her face looked unearthly in the moonlight, and a wave of the old longing surged over me, and I could feel my heart thumping against my ribs.

They drew a long breath as they reached the shadow of the tree, and they simultaneously took out their automatics.

“ Don’t kill him,” Olga said, and there was a little catch in her voice.

Her companion looked at her for a moment, then he laughed.

“ *Et tu, Brute,*” he said.

I felt as though my hurried breathing must

be audible a mile off, and my teeth were chattering like castanets. They went straight through the middle of the wood, and I heard the man say, "We'll quarter it after this. . . ." then he broke off as he saw our tracks leading away from it.

A moment later Gyp jumped to her feet and ran down the other side of the hill at top speed.

The subdued purr of the Rolls engine was audible in the road below. "The chauffeur's there," I gasped in her ear. She nodded. "Give me the revolver," she whispered back, "we need only frighten him—you drive."

We crashed through the hedge into the road. The man at the wheel was so muffled in wraps that he heard nothing till Gyp's voice made him jump.

"Hands up," she said sharply, and his arms flew above his head. "Tumble out quietly, and you can go safely," she began, then she looked closer.

"It's Greenwood," she said. "Get out."

He got out slowly and stood by the side of the road.

"Have you anything to say?" Her voice was relentless.

"They say," he jerked his head backwards, "that when their people come here there will be money enough for everyone,

and no work. I'm sick of grinding and toiling to keep kings and dukes and the likes of you in luxury. Equality—that's what I want."

"So for that dream you would betray your own country to her enemies."

"They're not Boches," he muttered.

"They're worse than Boches," Gyp's eyes gleamed, "and you're worse than either. You take money for your dirty work; you sell your country to buy your filthy body more of the drunken pleasure it craves for."

I was at the wheel, and glancing up the hill I saw the two figures emerging from the wood.

"Never mind the swine now," I urged, "hurry, Gyp."

Even I was unprepared for what happened next. There was a spurt of flame, a loud report, and Greenwood lurched forward, coughing hoarsely.

Then he lay still, and a little scarlet stream soaked its way across the snow.

Gyp flung herself into the seat beside me, and once more we passed into the night, with the quiet moon gazing down upon us.

"And now?" I asked, as the road was wound up beneath our wheels like a long ribbon.

She shook her head. "I've no ideas," she said sombrely; "the only thing I can think of is sleep. But before we can do that we must find a safe place."

She put out her hands as she spoke and brought them back covered with snowflakes.

"Thank heaven," she muttered; "take the first turn that looks at all practicable, and drive the car as far as she'll go. We needn't bother about saving the engine," she added, with the first laugh I had heard.

I drove on for another mile, then a rough cart track appeared at the right-hand side, up which I turned. By now the snow was coming down heavily, and I could see barely two yards ahead. We went up the track easily enough, but at the end of a quarter of a mile it stopped, and we were faced with a wide expanse of uphill moor, ending in a thick wood, which stretched as far as the top of the hill.

"This may be a bog or heather, or anything," I said.

"Reverse her up," was Gyp's advice; "the reverse gear is strong enough to tackle anything. Then we can back into the trees, and be protected on our rear at any rate."

"You ought to have been on the great General Staff."

"It might have been a good deal better run if I had," she said confidently.

The rise was steeper than it looked, and the snow was unpleasantly deep. Not being hard, as on the road, the wheels sank into it deeply, but the perfect engine never faltered, and we forced our way at last into the fringe of the wood.

Gyp jumped out to direct operations, and was immediately up to her waist in a large snowdrift.

"Oh, damn," she grumbled as she struggled out, clutching my hand, "that's given my arm a nice jar."

"You're too infernally plucky about yourself," I retorted; "one forgets that you've anything the matter with you."

"You won't forget it presently, while you're doing the ministering angel stunt," she said. "I bet you'll be very clumsy."

"Pity Hancock's not here." It was said without any *arrière-pensée*, but I was startled by the sudden quiver in the girl's voice. "I wish he were—oh, how I wish he were." Then she pulled herself together.

"You can push in a lot farther," she said quickly; "the wings 'll go, but that doesn't upset me; I want the front of the car to be absolutely flush with the wood."

There was an ominous sound of rending

and cracking—not altogether caused by brushwood—as I reversed still farther ; something resisted then gave way suddenly, and twigs and branches sprang together in front of the glass.

“ Good staff work,” Gyp said approvingly. “ I fancy they’d have their work cut out to find us to-night. In another few moments our tracks will be entirely covered up.”

“ It’s nice and warm inside,” she added, opening the door ; “ come on.”

I clambered in after her and shut the window tightly.

“ Draw the curtains, then I can use the electric torch.”

I pulled the heavy black silk curtains, embroidered, like the cushions, with red roses, across the panes, and Gyp flashed on the torch. “ Praise be for the Russian’s proverbial greed,” she said, as the light revealed a small basket with a festive-looking gold-necked bottle protruding from the corner.

“ They thought they might get ‘ heated in the chase,’ so they brought along refreshments. Think of them now, trailing back along those ten miles of snowy road. They must be loving us.”

“ I can’t help feeling a bit sorry for Greenwood,” I said ; “ after all, he was taken in by them and their arguments, poor devil.”

" Poor fiddlesticks," she said contemptuously, " that's where most Englishmen are so blind and foolish. It's the very fact that Bolshevism takes in so many half-educated fools that constitutes its chief strength. But there, I'll never make some of you see reason."

She sighed, half laughing, half in earnest.

" Well, here's to success," I said, pouring out the champagne, which frothed and headed over the rim of the glass.

A little colour came back into Gyp's face as she drank the wine, and some of the sparkle into the wide grey eyes.

I bound up her arm as well as I could with strips of linen torn from mysterious portions of her under-garments, then we put out the torch and sat in the warm darkness, while outside the snow whirled and eddied in drifting flurries.

There was a strange faint echo of a haunting perfume in the narrow space, and the red roses on the curtains seemed, to my excited fancy, to whisper and rustle in the shadows.

We sat in utter silence for a long time, and pictures began to form and dissolve before my eyes in the floating darkness. Perhaps this was the end, I thought, and to-morrow our enemies would find us ; and

I knew too much to care to dwell upon our probable fate.

Yet, in spite of it all, the bare thought of seeing Olga again, even under such conditions, made my pulses throb.

I stared before me unseeingly, and the pall of darkness about me was not thicker than the hopeless blackness of my outlook. I was so buried in thought that it took some time for a sound at my elbow to penetrate my consciousness. Then suddenly I realised that Gyp was crying. Crying helplessly, and with a hopeless abandon of which I would never have thought her capable.

I stretched out my hand and groped for hers.

"What's up, old thing?"

"I'm a fool, Deryk, but I can't help it. I'm so miserable."

"So am I," I said bitterly; "we're a cheerful couple. Never mind my worries though, they're mostly of my own making. What's the matter, old lady? Can I help?"

"No," she said despondently; "no one, nothing can. You see, I'm in love with Allan."

"But that's splendid. He's crazy about you. What's the trouble?"

"Don't you see," her voice shook, "it's just because I know he loves me and because

I love him so desperately, that I cannot marry him. I know you think I'm a fool, but I know I'm right ; I wish I wasn't."

She sobbed convulsively for a few minutes, and I tried vainly to think of something to say.

" Just as I wouldn't marry you," she went on presently, " because it wouldn't have been fair to your position and to your people, so I can't marry Allan because it wouldn't be fair to him."

" Thanks for the compliment."

" Don't be cross, Deryk. You didn't really care for me. You got carried away by the novelty of the thing. A ' really true ' spy was rather exciting. And now you're in love with Olga."

" How do you know ? "

" You're not the first, dear. She's one of the most fascinating women that has ever been born. And she's rotten, rotten to the core."

" I know," I said sadly, " but she's bewitched me. I almost hate her, and yet I ache for her."

" It's partly hypnotism," Gyp said, " and that influence will fade, but I think you're really fond of her too. It's all pretty hopeless, however : '*tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse.*' "

"But Gyp . . . Alan loves you too much to mind anything . . ." I stumbled over my words, "any little thing in the past."

"But I mind for him," her voice was deep and full, "you see, I never knew I was going to love anyone as I do him. If I had . . ." She broke off. "Well, let's pull ourselves together"; she spoke more calmly. "Anyhow, this job's going to be no joke. And I'm going to do my level best to carry it through."

"I'm with you. We'll always be pals, Gyp."

Her hand slid into mine. "Till the night comes down, and the stars grow cold, and the song of Hope grows faint and cold," she quoted.

I lit a cigarette and puffed slowly.

"How did you know where I was?" I asked.

"Allan found that out. I was absolutely on the wrong track. It's a long story, but I thought the paper was somewhere quite different. It's always the same. Never let anyone else influence your opinion. I listened to another agent's story—a man whose information's generally correct—and if it hadn't been for you I might have been hunting still."

Suddenly I jumped in my seat. The

experiences through which I had been passing, and the strain and excitement of the last few hours had put it completely out of my mind. But the thought came back like a sudden flash.

"Gyp," I almost shouted, "why did you send that code message on the back of your photo?"

"Oh, you got it then; when I had no answer from you I thought you hadn't been clever enough to guess that I had had some reason for suddenly sending you a picture of my sweet self. I didn't dare send you anything in the ordinary way."

"But you couldn't expect me to guess, that I was to take the message as meaning the exact opposite to what it said."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Well, you told me to help Olga in every way—that she was one of us."

Gyp gave a low whistle.

"So Olga got hold of the photo before you found the message. Now I begin to understand a good many things."

"I don't know what *you* mean," I said, a little irritably. "I got the photo the day I got pneumonia. While she was nursing me the frame got stained, and she took it away to have it cleaned."

"And being up to every trick," Gyp interrupted, "she suspected something; floated the picture off the mount, decoded my message which she found there, and substituted another mount with *her* message on it."

I gasped. "However did she know I would find it?"

"If you hadn't, she'd have soon seen to it that you did," Gyp said dryly. "I suppose what you eventually found was an injunction to trust her as yourself."

"Words to that effect," I said.

"Having sent a warning, I hoped for a bit that all was well; it was only when I heard nothing that I began to get jumpy."

"They thought I could decipher the damned thing," I burst out, "and I tell you, Gyp, that if I could have, I should have done so. I'm not fit to touch you. They tortured me and hypnotised me, and then Olga, Olga . . ." I broke off, and I felt Gyp's soft lips on my cheek.

"No, you wouldn't," she whispered. "Buck up old thing. Fate's being a bit of a beast to us both, but we can still fight. Remember the old tag—'Life ain't holding good cards, it's playing a bad hand well'?"

"You're a marvel, Gyp—a girl in a thousand."

"I guessed they were up to some of their pretty little tricks when they told me at the inn that you were staying 'awa' up at the big housie.' You've made a conquest there. Mrs. Mackenzie adores you."

"If I get alive out of this," I said fervently, "she's going to have the best grey silk to make her a dress for the 'Sawbath' that I can buy. 'A black's awfu' useful, but, whiles I'd likit fine to see myself in a braw grey silk again. It aye minds me of the days when he and I were courting.' I can hear her now, and you must help me to choose it, Gyp."

"Gyp," I said presently, "can I ask you one question? Don't answer if you'd rather not."

"Go on," she answered.

"What made them so sure that I knew the formula of the missing factor, or that you had told me?"

"Because we took good care that they should think so. It diverted their attention from someone else who was travelling night and day to reach safety, bringing back the formula of the essential factor."

"Then I *have* been of some use?" My heart gave an absurd leap. It was worth

while having suffered and having gone through all this misery if some definite good resulted.

"*Some* use!" Gyp repeated. "You're the person to whom we owe everything."

That was nonsense and I knew it, but her words made all the difference in the world. Some of the soreness and the hurt seemed to have disappeared, just as the sting of a cut lessens under the application of soothing balm.

The night wore on, and the cold seemed to bite even through the windows and curtains. I dozed a little, uneasily, and woke to find Gyp asleep against my shoulder. The first faint dawnlight was filtering through, and I saw how thin her face had grown, and the dark shadows underneath her eyes.

She stirred and woke up, rubbing her eyes with her knuckles like a sleepy child.

"I should like a big bath, filled to the brim with boiling water, and full of 'June Roses' bath salts," she said, ticking the items off on her fingers. "Then breakfast in bed: coffee, with lots of cream, hot rolls, and thin, scrunchy bacon. Instead of which I must clean my face by licking my handky."

"Only you haven't cleaned it," I objected; "you've smeared it."

"And eat last night's stale sandwiches,"

she continued, without paying any attention to my remark.

"It's six o'clock," I said, peering at my watch; "have you any plans?"

"Don't be so energetic, Deryk. You sound like the complete hostess at a house-party—'Who would like to see the ruins this afternoon, and who would like to go to tea with the de Vavasour Montmorencys?' I haven't got any plans, but I shall have to make some. 'Life's just one damned thing after another.'"

She yawned. "After this job is over I'm going to buy a cottage in the country, and keep hens, and become ultra-respectable."

"I don't think I should like you respectable," I teased.

"You're not the only pebble on the beach," she retorted.

"I think lots of people like you just as you are."

She smiled a little wistfully, but said nothing.

"Couldn't we have a try at running the car back to the station?" I suggested; "that is if the radiator's not frozen up."

"And get stopped by the police—firstly for Greenwood's murder, secondly for stealing a Mercedes, thirdly for stealing a Rolls-Royce. I hate to damp you, but try again."

"But even if the police did arrest us," I argued, "they aren't going to make away with us. They need only wire to London, and the Chief will come and bail you out."

"And in the meantime something—I can't say what—but some accident will have happened to us both. That crowd isn't going to be defeated by a couple of Scotch policemen. No, Deryk, we've got to give every one the slip if we want to get away safely, and I'm bothered if I know how. Every footpath to the station, and to every station within twenty miles, will be watched."

She cupped her chin in her hands, and sat thinking.

"I can only think of one plan," she said at last, "and that's a pretty desperate one. But desperate circumstances, desperate remedies. Do you know this part of the world at all?"

"Not a bit."

"I do a little; I was up here two years ago. About five miles from here is Coupar Fyvie, a small station, at which the express doesn't stop. And five miles from there is Kirkbui, another little station. Now listen. Between those two the railway goes up a long, steep hill. I've often wondered why they haven't made a tunnel. Thank Heaven

they haven't. The train slows down tremendously going up the hill. It seems as though one could walk faster. I dare say it won't seem so slow when you're outside."

"Well?" I thought I saw her idea.

"It's just possible that we might manage to get on to the train at the bit of the hill where it goes slowest. As it doesn't stop at either of those stations, Olga and her crowd won't be looking for us. It's a pretty forlorn hope, but I can't think of anything else."

"We'll have a good try, at any rate," I said more enthusiastically than I was feeling.

"What time does the train pass?"

"Seven o'clock to-night."

"It'll take us five hours' good going in this snow. Which will be safer—to wait here till it's time to start, or start now and hang about there?"

"There's about as much choice as there would be between hanging yourself and being hanged," Gyp said ruefully. "If we stay here we may get caught; if we have to hang about, you certainly, and I probably, will get pneumonia."

"Yes, but not till to-morrow," I argued hopefully, "and then it won't matter."

"Good for you, Deryk. Let's start."

I don't suppose that two people ever set out on a more forlorn adventure. Gyp made

me wear her woollen jersey, and although I protested at first I saw the force of her reasoning and finally gave in. She had a jacket, and I was dressed only in my shirt and trousers. I must have looked a funny sight in her brown sweater. She was broad-shouldered for a woman, but the sleeves only came half-way up my arms, and it reached a few inches below my waist. It was still snowing, and any fears we had about being visible to watching eyes were soon dispelled. In a few minutes we were covered with snow—not the variety that melts, but the sort that clings and eventually freezes on your garments.

At the end of half an hour we were both dripping with perspiration and absolutely breathless. I wanted to rip the jersey off and fling it into the snow, but Gyp's common sense prevailed. It seemed as though we had been walking for hours, and we had certainly not done more than half a mile.

Luckily Gyp possessed the gift of a sense of direction. And a gift it is—a sort of dim instinct, which has been handed down to some of us from a primeval age, when not to have it meant death.

Although blind with fatigue, she never faltered in her line of route. After what seemed an eternity of picking up our feet

out of a morass of snow and putting them down again only to slip backwards, I looked at my watch.

It was four o'clock. "How much farther is it"? I asked.

"I don't know," she said doggedly. "I only know that we're going in the right direction, and that if we stop for a single moment I shall never go on again."

Her face was deathly white, with grimy channels where the perspiration had dried in patches. The black shadows beneath her eyes looked as though they had been rubbed in with kohl, and her lips were blue and pinched. Only the eyes themselves shone with the steadfast glow that I knew of old.

We walked on blindly. The falling snow spun before my eyes in giddy spirals, and I began to dream as I went—absurd dreams of glowing fires, and warm, soft beds, and always the ever-renewing scent of red roses. At last I dreamed I was in bed, and the bliss of rest and warmth stole over me in great waves. But just as I was losing consciousness someone shook me violently and I awoke, to find my head pillowed in the snow and Gyp bending over me.

"Get up," she said desperately; "don't give in now, we're almost there—look at the lights."

It was quite dark, the snow had stopped, and the whole sky was ablaze with burning stars. Ahead of us was a dark mass of trees, and I could see quite plainly the station lights.

"It's all right," I murmured, pillowing my head again in the blessed snow, "you'll get there now." My eyes closed.

"Deryk!" she called piteously, and the note of pleading in her voice penetrated even my failing senses, "I can't go on alone; I'm done. I've never asked you to help me before. Don't fail me now." She choked helplessly, and something stronger than love, or weariness, or death, some tiny spark of that will power which lifts us above the beasts, awoke, and I dragged myself to my feet. Gyp was on her knees, shaking in a violent spasm of sickness. I put my arms round her and held her tightly.

Strength surged through me at the sight of her weakness, and I determined that we must win through.

"What's the time?" she gasped.

I looked at my luminous watch. It had stopped.

We began stumbling forward again, and the lights grew blessedly nearer. Every few yards Gyp was violently sick, but she never said a word, and dragged herself onwards.

She was swaying from side to side, and I could see the trickle of blood where her teeth bit her lower lip.

Then far away—but growing ominously nearer—I heard a sound which made my heart jump and then miss a beat.

It was the noise of the approaching express.

Gyp heard it too, and I saw her clutch at her throat unconsciously, as though struggling for air.

"Leave the lights on our left," she said, but so hoarsely that I could barely hear her; "the hill's the other side of the station." Luckily for us we had struck a footpath, and the going was comparatively easy. But even so the strain was appalling. We slipped and fell, not once but many times, and just as we passed the station Gyp pitched forward on her face and lay still. Close behind us I heard the roar of the train, but the frosty night air carried sound amazingly, and we still had a few minutes' respite.

I shook Gyp vigorously, rubbed snow in her face, and pulled her forward a few yards, but she was completely unconscious. I looked at her in despair—she lay as if dead—and now I could see the lights of the express.

Then, summoning up my last remnant of

strength, I left her, and stumbling, gasping and slipping, I climbed the steep hill. Luckily the line made a slight detour, and I gained a few minutes' grace. I heard the engine slacken, then take the ascent more slowly. I walked on to the line, at the very crest of the hill, and pulled out my handkerchief. Luckily it was a red bandanna. The outlines of the big engine loomed before me. I drew a long breath and shouted and waved wildly. There seemed no slackening of speed. I stood fascinated, unable to move, still shouting senselessly.

There was a grinding of brakes—a noise of shrill whistling—and the mighty mass heaved to a standstill.

Heads were thrust out of windows, voices chattered, and the guard came hurrying up.

“What the—w-what——” he spluttered.

“There’s a lady lying unconscious a hundred yards farther down the hill,” I said; “please carry her up, and put her in a carriage with me.”

The guard’s face began to dance up and down in front of my eyes, and my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth.

“We **MUST** reach London to-morrow. . . .” I could hardly find the words. “You **MUST** take us to-night. In the name of the King,” I added, and knew no more.

CHAPTER XX

“ LIFE AIN’T HOLDING GOOD CARDS . . . ”

WHEN I was next capable of appreciating my surroundings I was lying in a comfortable berth, with clean sheets, and a fur rug which some good Samaritan had thrown over me.

There was a little knot of people in the corridor, amongst whom I recognised the guard. The train was tearing through the night, obviously trying to make up time. I shut my eyes again, the relief was so blessed ; then I suddenly thought of Gyp.

I raised myself in my berth. “ Is the lady all right ? ”

They turned at the sound of my voice, and the guard detached himself from the group and came forward.

“ The lady’s asking for you, sir ; but first I must take your name and address. Most irregular proceeding, stopping the Scotch express, sir. I take it you have some good reason ? ”

I motioned to him to shut the door, “ I .

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had at least ten excellent reasons," I said,
"but unfortunately I can't give you even one."

His face took on the regular official expression.

"Of course I will give you my name and address," I added, "and if you like to come with me to Scotland Yard in the morning I think I can satisfy you that I was justified in what I did."

I passed a crisp Bradbury into his hand at the same moment.

"No, it isn't that, sir," he said, handing it back, "but I had to make sure that you was all right, so to speak. I can see it's O K now."

"Please," I insisted, pushing the bit of paper back to him, "just to drink my luck. I need it. We both do," I added.

He took it with a broad smile.

"Thank you, sir. I won't deny that an extra bit of money's a nice little bit of orl right, particularly nowadays. Will you go to the lady now, sir?"

I nodded.

"And I'd be awfully obliged if you'd get people back to the 'sleepers,'" I said, "and spread it around a bit that the lady and I are married. We're not—but it's all right," I added hastily, "it's all part of the business."

"That's all right, sir, I know a gentleman when I see one, and the lady's the prettiest thing I've set eyes on for many a long day. She might have walked off a magazine cover."

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Not far from Darlington, sir. You were unconscious for a goodish bit. But the brandy pulled you round. The same gentleman gave it you as put you on these clothes. You were soaked through. He knew you. His wife's looking after the young lady."

I was not over-pleased to hear that there was anybody on the train who knew me; however, I thought I had better make sure who it was. The brandy and the warmth were doing their work, and to my intense relief I only felt a little shaky, not at all feverish.

"Well, get the other people to bed," I said, "and ask the gentleman if he would be kind enough to speak to me. I want to thank him."

The guard went off, and a moment later a face was poked through the door.

I gave an exclamation of astonishment. It was my late battalion commander in France.

"Feeling better?" he asked, then he burst out laughing.

"'Pon my word, my clothes look quaint on you."

I glanced down at my feet and began to laugh too. He was a shortish, thick-set man, and I am a shade under six foot. There was a long expanse of bare leg, and then a large bony foot. The battalion commander was a bit of a knut in his way, and the suit was of dark brown with a fleck of yellow in the weave, cut in the latest style. It bagged hopelessly over my knees, and threatened to burst across my shoulders.

I think the sight was too much for Colonel Saunders. Anyhow he nipped out and returned with his dressing-gown.

"Take 'em off, young feller-me-lad," he chuckled, "just got 'em new for this leave. God bless my soul, I'd forgotten how big you were. Well, and what are you up to; cinema acting or what? Stopping the express, and boarding it with the prettiest bit of goods I've seen for five years."

"I'm jolly glad to see you, Colonel," I said. "I'd be glad anyhow, but I'm extra pleased to-day."

I knew my man. Saunders was a sound, efficient soldier, in spite of his noisy ways and effervescent spirits. I told him the most important details of the affair, and he listened carefully. "So you see," I wound

up, " I don't want a lot of questions asked, either now or when we get to Euston. The chief thing is to get that cursed paper safely deposited with Gyp's chief, and then to go to bed for a week—at least that's how I feel."

Saunders nodded.

" Glad to help in any way I can," Saunders said heartily. " I wish the pair of you luck. You've tackled a stiff proposition jolly well. But between ourselves, Warburton, is this talk about Bolshevism serious? I never paid much attention to it myself. Those Russians aren't like us. Damned foreigners! they're all alike. Up to any mischief. But you won't get Englishmen being taken in by that nonsense surely? "

" I used to think the same as you, Colonel, but I've had to change my mind. England's riddled with Bolshevist agents. Men who get hold of fellows like Greenwood, and make 'em believe that Bolshevism is the beginning of a sort of millennium. And the worst of it is that nothing's being done to stop it. The authorities just sit with their hands folded and hope nothing'll happen. You might as well throw a lighted fuse into a bag of powder and trust to luck that there'll be no explosion."

" It makes one think a bit," Saunders

agreed. "It seems a pretty rotten shame that after all the beastliness and discomfort out there, and all the good fellows who've 'gone West,' that England should go down through the machinations of a lot of dirty foreigners." He gnawed the ends of his moustache savagely.

"Well, let's hope the powers that be will wake up a bit," I said more cheerfully. "Do you think I look respectable enough to go and visit Gyp, or will your wife be shocked?"

"Shocked be damned," he said emphatically, "you can't shock the missus. I'm coming too. I must have another 'dekko' at that girl of yours; she's a peach."

"She's not my girl," I said lightly, "very much another's."

"I'm sorry." Old Saunders looked genuinely disappointed. "I thought you and she might have fixed up something between you during your wanderings."

I shook my head, and a sudden mental picture of Olga made my heart give a sick throb. I loved Gyp, and I would have gone to the ends of the world to save her, but I loved her like a brother, and my old longing to marry her had completely left me. Perhaps it was as well, I reflected. She was as passionately devoted to Allan as only a

strongly emotional nature can be, and anyhow, I should have no chance.

The rest of the passengers had gone to bed, having given up all hope of satisfying their curiosity.

I knocked at the door of the next sleeper, and a woman of about forty, with vivacious blue eyes, and the most obviously dyed hair I have ever seen, put her head round the corner of the door.

"What do you two want?" she said jokingly. "You're not to disturb my patient. Dick, I'm ashamed of you, at your age too. Can't keep away from a pretty face. Shall they come in, my dear?"

"Oh, please," I heard Gyp's voice say, and we squeezed in.

She was sitting propped up in bed, wrapped in shawls, with her black hair hanging down in two long plaits. The dark shadows beneath her eyes were very marked, but she looked happier and less strained.

"Are you all right, Deryk?"

"Right as rain—and you?"

"She's just 'done in.'" Mrs. Saunders answered for her, "and you're not to worry her. She ought to lie down and go to sleep, but the silly girl says she doesn't want to. Perhaps you can persuade her?" she turned to me.

"I'll try," I promised.

"Good night, my dear." Mrs. Saunders bent and kissed her almost tenderly. "If you're sick again, just send this young man for me. He'll find me in curling pins and——"

"Don't frighten him, May," Saunders said, slapping her on the back. "I know you, but Warburton's a bachelor. He'll be afraid to marry," and they went off, laughing like two children.

"She's a dear soul," Gyp said wistfully; "she's been so kind to me, and lent me shawls, and hot-water bottles, and given me brandy, and chicken jelly—she must travel with a good collection of hand-luggage."

"He's a jolly good soldier," I said, "and knows how to hold his tongue. I had to tell him some of our story."

"Of course," Gyp said. "Isn't it wonderful to think we've really done them in at last. I can give Colonel Campbell the paper to-morrow. Allan *will* be pleased. He's been quite as keen about it as I have. I could never have managed this job without you," she said loyally.

"That was more good luck than anything else," I laughed, "yours is the pluck that carried through—'No. 3.'"

Her eyes twinkled.

"I suppose Olga told you my name.

They call me that even in our own Service now. In fact, it's quite superseded my official alias."

I patted her hand and pulled the rug up farther. " You're to go to sleep now—and dream of Allan."

" I wish I could," she sighed, as she snuggled down in the pillows, " but I shall only dream of snow-drifts, and feeling sick. . . . Don't turn off the light," she gasped, sitting up suddenly, " I'm afraid."

" I'm going to take the other berth," I said gently, " and nothing's going to hurt you."

" You're a great brick, Deryk." She held her arms out like a child to be kissed.

" Wouldn't it simplify things if I were in love with you, and you with me ? " she said wistfully.

" Why shouldn't we make the best of a bad job ? " I asked. " You won't let bygones be bygones and marry Allan, and I can't marry Olga—and no one would ever get on better than you and I do. I'd do my best to make you happy, dear, and you want looking after. You've racketed through life alone long enough."

" I know, and I'm so tired of it all. But no good ever came of taking second-best because you couldn't get the best. I don't

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think I was born under a lucky star. Perhaps I'm fated to wander through the world alone."

"Rot," I said inelegantly, "nothing of the sort. You'll marry and have a large family and write your reminiscences—'When I was a Spy,' or 'How I Bluffed the Bolshies.'"

I shaded the light and lay down. The rhythmic noise of the wheels acted like a narcotic, and soon I was sleeping the deep, dreamless sleep of the utterly exhausted.

I woke with a start, thinking someone was calling, but all was quiet. Gyp was breathing peacefully. One arm was hanging down, and the amber bracelet she always wore gleamed against her brown skin in the half-light. In repose her face looked very tragic, and her words re-occurred to me suddenly: "Perhaps I'm fated to wander through the world alone."

I shook myself impatiently and went to sleep again.

Gyp woke me up, and I stared vacantly round before I could remember where I was.

"I think you'd better go and dress—try a shave, too," she teased. "No, my dear, I'm more than ever convinced that we shouldn't do well as a married couple. You've got a very strong beard."

I hurried away and appeared half an hour later, shaved and clean about the face, though my clothes bore signs of what they had suffered during the past few days.

Saunders had lent me his coat—British Warm—to hide the fact that I was minus a jacket, so altogether my appearance was somewhat patchy. Gyp looked as fresh and tidy as if she had just come in from a country walk. She even had some colour in her cheeks, and her whole aspect was brighter.

" Perhaps I'm being a fool," she whispered to me. " I feel so happy this morning that I can't help thinking that when I see Allan, I shall begin to weaken."

" Hope to Heaven you do," I said piously.

Thanks to Saunders, there was no fuss at Euston, and by a miracle we succeeded in getting a taxi.

" You might drop me at my flat," Gyp said. " I'll phone you directly I know what time Colonel Campbell can see us."

" But you don't need me," I objected.

" Don't be an idiot, Deryk," she said affectionately. " It's all thanks to you that we've brought this affair to a successful conclusion. I must get hold of Allan at once."

" Do you think he will come ? " I asked.

She glanced at me and actually blushed,

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and to see Gyp blush was to see something rather delicious.

We drew up at her block of flats in Portland Place. “Au revoir,” she called over her shoulder. “Now I’m going to have what I wanted yesterday morning—bath, salts, breakfast.”

Two hours later my telephone bell rang, and I hurried to answer it. “Colonel Campbell’s away,” Gyp’s voice said, “dash the man. However, we’re to go to his flat directly he gets back, about eleven o’clock to-night. Look here, let’s dine all three, at a little restaurant in Soho that Allan knows of. The proprietor’s a pal of his. I’m not particularly anxious to go to any of those big places. We’ll call for you about eight.”

“Who’s we?”

“Don’t be an idiot——” Then I heard a scuffle at the other end, and Allan Hancock’s voice: “Hullo! you little hero. I suppose you’ve got swollen head pretty badly. What? Yes, I am making Gyp listen to reason. Oh, she’s pretty obstinate, but so am I.” And he rang off.

I spent most of the day sleeping, and at eight o’clock Hancock and Gyp arrived.

I shall always remember how adorable she looked that evening. She was wearing a

dress of some dark blue stuff, and a sort of tammy in soft cherry-coloured velvet was pulled low on to her head. She and Allan were in excellent spirits, and they both of them ragged me unmercifully while we were waiting for dinner to be served in the small private room that Hancock had taken.

"Is the food good here, I'm starving?" she asked.

"Best in London," he answered. "Old Luigi's not here himself to-night, unfortunately, ill or something. He was all right this morning. It's a pity. He's a regular character, and I'd like you to have met him."

"Did you say we were in Frith Street?" I asked, looking out of the window, but it was too dark to see anything.

"No, just behind. A little street off it. Ah! here's dinner. Where's Beppo?"

"He is out, m'sieur."

"Tiresome," Allan grumbled. "My pet waiter and Luigi both away. How annoying."

"Never mind, the soup's very good," Gyp said. "I shouldn't mind if we never saw another waiter, as long as the rest of the dinner's as scrumptious."

Poor old Allan beamed all over his face with pleasure, and looked at Gyp with eyes full of dog-like devotion.

The food certainly was delicious, and the white wine was the best of its kind. We sat and talked till nearly half-past ten, then Gyp got up reluctantly.

“We ought to go now. It’ll take us a good twenty minutes to get to Knightsbridge.”

Allan rang the bell, and as the waiter came in turned to help Gyp on with her coat. I reached for my hat, which was hanging on the rack when I felt a stunning blow on the back of my head. I think I must have fallen, but I was not quite unconscious, for I distinctly smelt the sweet sickly odour of chloroform. Then a black curtain came down and blotted out everything.

When I opened my eyes, I could not be sure whether hours or only minutes had passed.

I tried to speak but I was gagged and bound, and my hands were tied behind my back. On my right was Hancock, the blood flowing freely from a cut in his head.

They had propped Gyp on a chair, she was also gagged and bound, and one of the three men was systematically examining her clothing. Allan made a convulsive movement, and a man turned on him savagely: “Stay quiet, you are quite alone with us. Luigi is lying at the bottom of the Thames ;

he will tell no tales. And the other waiters have left. There is only Cristophe here who knows anything, and he is with us."

He turned impatiently to the man who was examining Gyp. "Have you found nothing? Hoffmann swears the girl has both the paper and the missing formula."

He spoke in German, but the other replied in Russian, evidently in the negative. But one word caught my ear. It was the name Dansaz. Evidently this was he. The supreme head of this particular service.

I looked at Gyp, but she sat motionless, and did not glance my way. The street outside was very quiet, and I heard in the distance the tramp of a police patrol. But to us, gagged and bound as we were, they might as well have been in Bond Street for all the help they could be.

"Strip her," Dansaz snarled, at last, and the other man dragged at Gyp's things roughly, and literally tore them in pieces. They pulled down her hair and ran their fingers through it, tossing the two big tortoise-shell pins she always wore into a corner.

Dansaz's face grew white with rage, and he muttered something to his assistant. The latter picked the girl up in his arms, her heavy hair half veiling her lovely body, and

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carried her towards a door, which led into another room.

Below I heard the steps of the police patrol approaching. Dansaz and the other man had turned their backs. It happened in a flash. The window was tightly shut, but it was one of the broad paned French sort, which open outwards. It was tall and narrow, and below it was a seat, heaped with cushions. Allan ran back, then turned, and leapt with all his force upon the seat, using it as a sort of lever. He thrust forward and outward with head and shoulders and I saw him fall through the shattered window-pane. Then a second’s silence, and the sound of a sickening thud.

I heard a police-whistle—running steps—a violent hammering upon the door below, and then pandemonium broke loose. The three men ran for the door. and as they reached it one of them stopped and fired at Gyp who lay helpless where they had dropped her. I saw the bullet bury itself in the woodwork just above her head. One of them lost his footing, and evidently rolled down the stairs from top to bottom. I heard more shots, then the crash of the falling door, and steps ascending the stairs.

A big policeman bent over Gyp, and un-

bound her. She tried to sit up, but the effort was too much and she fainted.

* * * * *

There is not much more to tell. Allan was quite dead when they picked him up. His skull had been fractured by the fall. Next day, Gyp, white and shaky, insisted that I should accompany her to the office, where she handed Colonel Campbell the missing paper. Her eyes were dry, and her voice never even shook, but the look on her face frightened me.

"As usual," Campbell said quietly, "you've done a difficult job magnificently."

"It wasn't me," she said lifelessly, "it was Deryk and Allan . . . And Allan gave his life for it in the end."

"You must take a long rest now," Campbell laid his hand on her arm. "You're utterly overstrained, and overdone. We've got Dansaz, and we shall get Hoffmann—Ivanovitch we may leave to the French. Go into the country, Gyp, and rest."

"That's what Allan said—only he was coming too . . ." her face worked piteously, and she broke into a storm of tears.

"Thank God," he muttered, and carried her across to the sofa as though she were a child. Her sobs shook her from head to

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foot, but presently they stopped, and the face she lifted from the pillow had lost its awful look of immobility.

"Had they decoyed Luigi away last night?" she asked.

"Apparently so," the Chief said, "and bribed most of the waiters, saying they were doing it for a bet. How Dansaz got wind of your going there, I don't know, but I fancy he had an accomplice."

"Yes, the man he called Cristophe," Gyp said quickly.

"Well, they've all been laid by the heels together—thanks to you three."

"What about Olga?" Gyp asked casually, but I knew she did it for my sake.

"I got a wire this morning," Colonel Campbell said, "and she's completely disappeared."

"I expect she and I will come to grips some day. Good-bye for the present," Gyp said quietly; "I'm going into a nursing home to-night for a six weeks' rest cure, and after that I'm ready for any job you can give me."

"Are we to be allowed to come and see you?" I asked.

"'Allowed' be damned!" Cassel Campbell said. "I am coming whatever anyone may say."

Gyp smiled. It was a wan little smile, but her gallant spirit shone as indomitably as ever in the wide grey eyes.

The door closed behind her, and we heard the grating of gears as her taxi drove away.

" That's a great girl ! " Campbell's voice was not quite steady.

" She acts up to her favourite proverb," I said thoughtfully : "' Life ain't holding good cards ; it's playing a bad hand well.' *Munch*

THE END

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